

THE
PASSIONATE
ADVENTURE

FRANK
STAYTON

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BY
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CHAPTER I

“MY dear, I hope you’re not ill?” inquired Lady Rolls with sympathetic curiosity. “I don’t look ill, do I?” replied Drussilla with a smile. She rather disliked these half-hours after dinner with women who frequently said much that they would subsequently regret, who were both alarmingly frank and almost painfully confidential; but she was far too experienced as a hostess and too well bred as a woman to show any signs of her distaste.

“No,” said Lady Rolls; “but you’ve been consulting Theodore.”

Lady Rolls was the wife of a popular Harley Street specialist on neurasthenia and other diseases of the century, though he preferred to refer to himself as a neurologist. A knowledge of the more importunate sex, a delightful manner, and the use of a few carefully selected phrases from the vade-mecum

of the much-paragraphed psychoanalyst, had assured him a huge clientele from among the best people; that is to say, the people who had nothing to do but amuse themselves. The fact that he made money was consoling to his wife, the realization of his popularity amazed her. She thought him dull and rather stodgy. But his success opened many doors for her entertainment. She loved entertaining and being entertained. She possessed to a marked degree the fashionable facility for talking about one's own affairs to the exclusion of everything else. She used Christian names with that large generosity so baffling to an outsider who found it hard to grasp whether "Vi" was the Duchess of Bilcester or a popular musical-comedy star, whether "Flappo" was a prominent politician, celebrated in the polo arena, or the name of a patent medicine. People accepted her for her good humor, her smart clothes, her willingness to amuse and to be amused. She was young enough to conceal her age and old enough to conceal her views. She rarely made an awkward remark—the kind of remark that introduced Truth, naked and repellent, into the polite circles she adorned. She loved being photographed for the illustrated papers. Her conversation was admirably superficial. She could converse with bishops and politicians, actors and anarchists, dull squires and exotic literary amateurs, with equal facility. She was devoted to the science

of dress—the one subject she took seriously—and on the whole was a great trial to her husband, whom she steadfastly refused to take seriously.

She had on this particular evening enjoyed a wonderful dinner, admirably cooked, perfectly served—for Drusilla was renowned as a hostess; and she now looked forward to some pleasantly intimate conversation in front of the gloriously inviting fire with her exquisitely gowned though at times exasperatingly reticent friend.

Drusilla always interested her; she was so charming, so well bred, and so peculiarly reserved. Though Hilda Rolls had known Drusilla St. Clair for many years, she sometimes wondered, in her rare moments of silence, whether she really knew Drusilla at all.

The house in Hill Street was so perfect from every point of view, perfectly furnished, perfectly administered, comfortable, luxurious without ostentation, a perfect background for Drusilla's personality. And her hostess's somewhat statuesque beauty never clashed with her own animated prettiness.

She liked Adrian, too. Adrian was a model husband; but this never failed to make him an amusing host or an interesting companion. Adrian and Drusilla were such a delightful couple to entertain or by whom to be entertained. They always kept something in reserve; but that was rather an advan-

tage in these days of almost brutal frankness and lack of reticence. Coming to their house was a kind of mental rest-cure. You were not expected to be smart or brilliant; you could save up your attempts at epigram for the houses of the less assured, houses that had to gain a reputation, houses that one went to out of curiosity, perhaps. But the reputation of Drusilla's house was fixed and permanent. It was almost a survival. Adrian's mother had been a little old-fashioned in Edwardian days; she had been brought up to admire Victorian ideas. Her husband's mother had been Victorian in the large sense that embraced a small and fearfully select visiting list and a steadfast refusal to open the front door of the house in Hill Street any wider to permit the entry of the newly enriched commercial magnates and their impossible families. Adrian himself was a curious result of the refusal of several generations to admit the changing of times and manners. In some ways, he was a throw-back to the days of the Regency.

"How did you know that I had been consulting Theodore?" inquired Drusilla, after Emmett, the butler, had served the coffee and taken his departure.

Lady Rolls lit a cigarette and laughed. "I always ask his secretary whether any one interesting has been consulting him," she explained. "A nice girl, but very indiscreet. So useful. I don't think

there ought to be any secrets between husband and wife, do you? Not even professional ones. . . . I'm sure you have no secrets from Adrian, any more than he has any secrets from you."

Drusilla smiled and sipped her coffee. "Adrian and I rarely become confidential," she admitted.

"You don't need to," replied Lady Rolls promptly. "There's nothing mysterious about either of you. You're such a model couple; you never quarrel; you live in a delightful house; your dinners are perfect; and your friends envy you. . . . Now, Theodore and I quarrel all the time. He's such an irritating person. . . . Why did you consult him? Surely *you* are not suffering from nerves?"

"I don't think so," replied Drusilla. She was the farthest removed from the neurotic type. To her friends, she was almost an anachronism; she was so calm, well balanced. She showed no excitement. She was reliable. One could forecast her behavior with accuracy. She kept to the time-table—one might say—as certainly as an Atlantic liner. She never did unexpected things. The nervous unrest of the century left her almost marooned upon an island of sanity. To be assured without being arrogant, to be friendly without being intimate, to be responsive without becoming confidential, such were the rules she had been trained to observe. Should Society survive the half-century, Drusilla would un-

doubtedly become its ideal "great lady." She had a manner without losing her manners. The "great lady" of the Victorian era was frequently insufferably arrogant and eaten up with pride; she accepted homage as a right, resented familiarity as an unforgivable sin. Drusilla was too modern to indulge in patronage; but her breeding and her detachment marked her out for leadership.

"Most of us are a mass of nerves nowadays," asserted Lady Rolls, ignoring the ash-tray and flicking her cigarette-end upon the exquisite Persian rug. "My dear, we're too emotional! We're so intent on being ourselves that we forget every one else. Though, after all, there's nothing more interesting than studying oneself. And it's good for business—for Theodore's business, I mean. How any one can waste five guineas for his opinion is a puzzle to *me*. Personally, I find his opinions positively futile."

"He's our leading nerve specialist," protested Drusilla.

"That's because he has such good manners," explained the leading nerve specialist's wife. "And he always prescribes the most agreeable forms of treatment: a winter at Cannes, a spring in Italy, a summer in Norway, an autumn on the moors. Can you wonder that his waiting-room is crowded?"

Drusilla smiled. "I'm sorry you don't believe in him," she said.

"How *can* you believe in the man you're married to?" exclaimed Lady Rolls, throwing away her hastily consumed cigarette and glancing at her face in a miniature hand-mirror. "He's a most delightful person when he is n't at home. When he is, he fusses; and he's as nervous as a cat. Not one woman in a million knows what she's marrying."

She glanced at Drusilla, who, with a slight frown, was contemplating the toe of her shoe. Perhaps it was true that not one woman in a million knew what she was marrying. She was carried away, perhaps by passion, possibly by ambition, at times by a mixture of both. Two comparative strangers pitched their tent on an unknown island and sat down to the ordeal of making each other's acquaintance. They were explorers, discovering unknown countries; biologists, dissecting through the microscope of propinquity; students, engaged in research work, tabulating for future reference the limitations of a fellow-creature. Sometimes the mystery was baffling; sometimes the cold white light of reality played too cruelly on unsuspected weaknesses. With knowledge came reaction, repulsion, disappointment; in exceptional cases, pity and love. Of course there *were* exceptional cases: two souls roaming through infinity, each finding his or her predestined mate in the other. These progressions were rare, to be envied; they connoted completion. Understanding was theirs; and, with understanding,

human defenses are rendered impregnable. Drusilla's ideas concerning men were vague and uncertain before marriage. The material actualities of marriage had come as rather a shock. Her fastidiousness was abnormal. But, with time, came understanding; with understanding, love. She fought herself, fought her own disabilities—disabilities that owed their origin to faulty training. She was the victim, not only of a material environment, but of a hideous Victorian prudery that refused to acknowledge fundamental facts in actual words, a prudery that mistook ignorance for innocence, that indulged in an orgy of fig-leaves. . . .

"Why did you consult Theodore?" repeated Lady Rolls, who liked to have her curiosity satisfied.

Drusilla put down her coffee-cup. "I have n't been sleeping well," she explained.

"Poor dear! I know what that is," said Lady Rolls sympathetically. "Sometimes I wake at seven and simply *can't* get to sleep again. It seems a century before my maid brings me my tea at nine. And Theodore—who sleeps with his mouth open and snores like a collie—never wakes until he's called. So selfish of him! If he were a child, I should suspect him of adenoids. Men are so inconsiderate. Does Adrian suffer from insomnia?"

"He has n't mentioned it," replied Drusilla.

Lady Rolls stared. "But surely you——" She hesitated. "Surely if you're awake——" She

paused for a moment. "Oh," she exclaimed. "I see."

That Adrian and Drusilla should not occupy the same room was what a journalist would call news. It was a fact entirely unsuspected by their friends. Of course marriage was n't in the least what it used to be. Husbands and wives lived virtually separate lives nowadays; she and Theodore did. But that Adrian and Drusilla should be following the prevailing fashion came as something of a shock. One had ideals—for one's friends, and one liked one's friends to live up to those ideals. One was disappointed when they did n't. "What did Theodore tell you to do?" she inquired.

Drusilla gave a shrug. "To avoid all worry, to get plenty of fresh air, and to put my feet in a mustard-bath before going to bed."

Lady Rolls had heard the same advice being given to numerous patients; she knew that her husband owned some shares in mustard, and concluded that such a prescription was excusable in the circumstances. "Well, *you* can't have any worries, my dear," she protested.

"Of course not," agreed Drusilla.

Lady Rolls fidgeted. Drusilla was so terribly detached, so exasperatingly impersonal. She was invariably courteous, and apparently interested in whatever subject the conversation embraced. But she rarely gave an opinion, rarely opposed a state-

ment; she merely fed and fanned the conversation, keeping herself as much as possible in the position of a listener. It would have delighted Lady Rolls if Drusilla had occasionally made a positive assertion or shown a little heat in argument. She was such a contrast to her cousin Pamela.

"Where has Pamela disappeared to?" inquired Lady Rolls.

"I think she's going to a dance," explained Drusilla. "She was trying to persuade Adrian to go."

"Adrian dances divinely," said Lady Rolls dreamily. "Don't *you* ever dance?"

"Not these modern dances," replied Drusilla. "I'm old-fashioned."

Lady Rolls put her hand on Drusilla's arm. "You're very restful, my dear," she said. Drusilla, though she carefully concealed the fact, hated being touched, while she hated herself for hating it—though hate is, perhaps, too definite a word to use in this instance. Drusilla *shrank* from being touched; she shrank from showing it. She was ashamed of herself for nursing this prejudice. She could n't exclaim, "Oh, don't paw me about!" as Pamela would certainly have done. Pamela could say almost anything without causing offense. She was naturally direct.

"Pamela is all nerves and temperament," observed Lady Rolls reflectively. "Like *me*," she added, as though the idea flattered her vanity. She

prided herself on being a highly strung martyr to nerves and was ambitious to be considered temperamental.

"A little undisciplined, perhaps," suggested Drusilla.

"We 're all suffering from reaction after too much discipline," asserted Lady Rolls, echoing a popular superstition. She herself had spent the last three years of the war with some cousins in Ireland where food was plentiful and risks slight. She had enjoyed the war—in a way, at a safe distance. Of course there had been the worry of Theodore in the numerous air raids. But Theodore invariably went to bed when there was an air raid and slept through it undisturbed. But memory, that subtle flatterer, and time, that convenient wet rag, had combined to make her believe that she had suffered intensely, had accepted discipline in a patriotic spirit, and had emerged from the nightmare something of a heroine.

"I was brought up to discipline myself and all my impulses," explained Drusilla.

"Adrian, too?" inquired Lady Rolls.

Drusilla smiled. "I have never seen Adrian lose his temper. I've never even heard him swear."

"I rather like hearing a man swear," replied Lady Rolls. "Especially when he says the things one would like to say oneself."

They spoke of the difficulties of getting servants,

of the exorbitant prices, of the theaters, the latest books, and the general discontent. As a rule, Drusilla preferred to avoid all controversial subjects. She herself had never experienced any difficulty in getting servants; she was considerate, firm, easy to please, and the staff appreciated both the discipline and the atmosphere. That the public should be fleeced in order to provide exorbitant profits for those unnecessary but persistent speculators in food-stuffs from whom the retail tradesmen made their purchases was no doubt very annoying—almost a tragedy to people in humble circumstances; but Drusilla's mind rarely groped in the mazes of abstract ideas. She shrank from what was unpleasant and apparently unavoidable. She went a good deal to the theater and thought the entertainment provided was as a rule beneath serious consideration. It sometimes occurred to her to inquire why musical plays must always come from Vienna or Berlin, farces from Paris, and dramas from America; and was informed that the new type of theatrical manager had conceived a violent prejudice against English dramatists and their work. Drusilla thought this a little hard on the English dramatists but continued to go to the theater. The modern novel, with its broken-up chapters and its huge length, she found herself unable to cope with. She was old-fashioned enough to prefer a book that you could finish at a sitting. To take up a novel, only

to discover that one must have read at least three novels by the same author in order to understand his latest effort and to be able to place the characters, made the effort of reading too fatiguing. As for the general discontent, such things had invariably followed the conclusion of a long war. The spoils were for the victors—that is to say, for those who had stayed at home and profited thereby; and the conquerors were indulging in an orgy of pity for the conquered. Financiers were of more importance than statesmen, than sailors and soldiers. Those who had gambled in marks wanted Germany to be set on her feet at the expense of France—even at the expense of England, in order that they themselves should not lose their stakes. They wept crocodile tears over Germany's terrible plight, and the Boche grinned delightedly. The English would always be fools. France suffered, bled, turned wearily to the necessity for action. She was deserted by her allies in order that the financiers of Europe might increase their wealth. Wages rose, unemployment increased, taxes were staggering; civilization trembled. Drusilla heard of these tragedies; she sympathized with France, loathed the Hun, sympathized with the unemployed. But such things were too painful to contemplate for long. Each individual must work out his or her own problem. Drusilla's life was circumscribed by her environment. The cyclone shook her doors, rattled her windows; but her training

triumphed. Destiny had a sneaking sympathy with the county families: they would survive, persist, enjoy their hunting, their shooting, their trips to Biarritz and to Cannes, despite industrial strife.

Drusilla was conservative; she deplored change of any kind; she was a constitutional reactionary. Her environment had taught her the necessity for class loyalty. Lady Rolls, on the other hand, liked to be in every forward movement; she welcomed anything new, took a friendly interest in iconoclastic philosophy, realized the fascination of rebuilding; though she understood very little, she appreciated ideas, and rather enjoyed what Drusilla considered the topsy turvy condition of society. "Theodore thinks the present unrest is due to the effect of high explosives on the atmosphere," she asserted. "And the other night at dinner I met a perfectly fascinating man—he was a yogi, or a mahatma, or something of the kind. *He* said that the present slump in moral sense was due to the passing over of so many incomplete souls: they were n't ready for the higher spheres, so they remained—suspended, I think he called it—between the earth and the lowest floor of heaven, and spent most of their time trying to make us all do things we shouldn't dream of doing in normal circumstances. It was frightfully thrilling. So useful, too, when one's done something one would rather not have done, or left undone something one ought to have done. So long

as some one else is responsible, you see, it does n't much matter *what* you do. 'C'est la guerre!' as they used to say in France."

Drusilla shuddered. "I think it's wiser to forget the war," she protested.

"Still, it is nice to think there's some excuse for our behavior," replied Lady Rolls. "But I suppose if there was n't we should invent one. I try hard to make excuses for Theodore, but he's such an egoist. He thinks he's master of his fate, and captain of his soul, and all that. How *can* one be master of one's fate when one's body is nothing but an overcrowded tenement for housing germs? Theodore says they're discovering new ones every day. Some of them are so small that they can't be seen. But the doctors know that they are there. It's amazing to have such belief."

The conversation returned to Pamela. "I'm a little worried about her," said Drusilla. "She does such impossible things."

"We all do," sighed Lady Rolls. "We're social bolshevists, though some of us don't know it. But Pamela's literary—which is an excuse for almost anything. Somebody told me that she was going to write realistic fiction in the Russian manner, or keep a diary, or something of the kind."

"She says she wants to study the economic condition of the underworld," explained Drusilla, with a mental shiver at the idea.

"Oh, my dear!" cried Lady Rolls. "It would be far more interesting to learn how the Rich live."

Half the fascination of life lies in its unexpectedness. In a carefully constructed drama the situations are led up to; but in life a crisis comes upon one with bewildering suddenness. The actors are given their parts, without stage directions, in complete ignorance of the scheme of the play, of the intentions of the author. Some are clever enough to conceal their ignorance; they trust to their talents, to good luck, to their experience to make a success. They say it will be "all right on the night," and occasionally it is. Others try to get at the author's meaning, and fall between conscientiousness and desire. Some give their own readings, indifferent to the susceptibilities of their fellows, and achieve success by their egotism. Others throw up their parts, fearful of failure. Some plod on, content to play small parts, unnoticed by the critics; others achieve stardom by a freak of fortune. The play goes on; fresh actors are chosen; the manager's office is besieged. "Give me a chance," cry the aspirants. And in the gallery sit the gods, chuckling. The author, hidden by the curtains of his box, lets the play go on and makes no sign. When he is judged by his actors, perhaps he will explain. "If only the author would have told me what he wanted, I could have done it," wails an actor. "The author has given me a good part, and I flatter myself that I have im-

proved it," boasts another. But the author watches his play, sorrowful at the mess most of the cast are making of it, pitying failure, sympathetic with effort, but impotent to speak a word of encouragement. That is his tragedy.

Had Drusilla realized the reason why Adrian had excused himself from attendance on Pamela at the dance that evening, much that had mystified her during the last few months would have been made plain. She might have suffered in anticipation much that she suffered after realization. No warning came to her, no intimation that the crisis of her life was upon her, that within an hour or so her future would be decided by her own courage, understanding, and strength. No call-boy warned her to make ready for her entrance. One privileged to read the script can look back and understand what led up to it.

Meanwhile, Drusilla listened to the chatter of Hilda Rolls, occasionally interpolating a remark.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Adrian St. Clair married Drusilla Longworth, the world voiced its approval in the time-worn phrase, "How eminently suitable!" And so it seemed to their friends. For Adrian had inherited a comfortable fortune from his father—a fortune that even the death-duties failed to disturb to any annoying extent, the house in Hill Street, a beautiful old place in Hampshire with some very fine shooting, and a mental attitude of contentment with things as they are; or rather, as they *were* in those far-off, pre-war, peaceful days when Ireland was treated as comic relief, the suffragettes accepted philosophically, and the German Menace disbelieved in by all the best-informed politicians. Winchester had taught him never to question accepted facts, and Oxford had put the polish on his manner of ignoring them. In the language of his order, his views were sound.

Excelling in all forms of sport, without making himself too conspicuously prominent, he was universally popular and greatly in demand. Drusilla, with a few thousands a year of her own, and an inherent distaste for seeing unpleasant things, seemed

an ideal mate with whom to settle down in double harness. Tall, with an exquisite figure, perfect features, natural repose, and a well-modulated voice, she was thoroughly well suited to her environment. Their dinners were appreciated, their receptions well attended, and they themselves were immensely sought after. Drusilla wore her clothes with a natural grace that flattered her dressmaker, an artist of international celebrity; while Adrian was known as the best-dressed man in London.

His reputation required some living up to. Even at Winchester he had been a bit of a dandy. Without being a prig, he loathed dirt. A dirty collar made him feel physically sick. Equally objectionable were finger nails in mourning. His clothes never looked as though they had been dragged about the floor. He did well at cricket; he was a graceful bat, punished loose bowling mercilessly, took no risks with a good-length ball, and at cover-point was almost as quick as Gilbert Jessop. He also excelled at squash-rackets and could do the 440 yards in almost record time. Football did not attract him. Even as a boy he was a wonderful shot.

He had a flair for the classics that appealed strongly to the masters. His efforts at verse-making were by no means to be despised. At Oxford his cricket maintained the same classical level, but his success was chiefly personal. He founded a school of philosophy; that is to say, he was the

acknowledged leader of a certain set. They were known as the Epicureans; though certain ribald youths dubbed them the Cocoa Brigade, a title that originated in the mind of a scoffing undergraduate who imagined that epicurean had some connection with the cocoa of a certain Mr. Epps who advertised largely on hoardings.

During his three years at that home of lost causes Adrian brought the art of dressing to perfection. His tailor asked for guidance, pondered Adrian's remarks, cherished them, acted on them. At the same time it should be clearly understood that Adrian never posed. It pleased him to be perfectly dressed. If he wanted to do a thing, he did it. His reputation followed him to London. To do one thing better than the majority is to achieve celebrity. Not that he desired celebrity; he possessed to a peculiar extent the average well-bred Englishman's dislike of being considered different from his fellows. He came down from Oxford in 1909 and for four strenuous years occupied himself completely in the art of enjoying life. Then he met Drusilla.

He admired her beauty and appreciated her fastidiousness. Apparently they spoke the same language. Their engagement occasioned little surprise; their marriage was the event of the season. It took place at St. George's, Hanover Square. It had become a family tradition to be married at that

particular church. They spent their honeymoon abroad—Paris, Châmonix, Marienbad, Deauville; then went north to Scotland. In the late autumn they settled down in Hill Street after a month at their house in Hampshire.

No quarrels marred the harmony of their existence; their life together was peaceful, passionless, and smooth. They had no children. Drusilla, who loved orderliness in a house, ignored that fashionable substitute for a family, the pet Pekingese. Their domestic machinery ran on well-oiled wheels.

They had been married for fourteen months when Germany began her campaign for annexing the earth. Adrian joined up as a matter of course; he could have worn red tabs and a brass hat had he cared to signify his preference for such a privilege, but the subtleties of wangling were not in his line of country; so he was posted, after a short experience with the O.T.C., to a new battalion of a famous regiment of infantry, and as a subaltern was extremely popular with his brother officers. Later on, after crossing the channel, he became still more popular with his men. For Adrian had suddenly begun to take the war seriously. It was no longer a sporting interlude, interrupting his private arrangements for a few months; the winning of the war had become with him a religion. Mentally, he had grown up; and, in the process, he had acquired knowledge.

Meanwhile, Drusilla served on committees. When Adrian joined his regiment, she invited Pamela, her cousin, whose father commanded a brigade in the original Expeditionary Force and was killed at Landrecies, to live with her. Pamela, a school-girl of sixteen, alone in the world, accepted gratefully. She was a temperamental child, modern, restless, critical; and, though she enjoyed being with Drusilla, living in such a perfectly ordered household and meeting all sorts of interesting people, she was at times exasperated almost beyond endurance by her cousin's detached, impersonal methods. Pamela herself was very responsive, quick to take offense, but ready to give affection, love, and loyalty. If a thought came into her mind, she gave it utterance. No one knew what Drusilla was thinking, she so rarely said anything but that which was expected of her. Pamela could scarcely make up her mind whether Drusilla missed Adrian or whether she accepted his absence as she accepted most things—with well-bred philosophy.

Adrian rarely came home on leave; he took his soldiering seriously. In those days, England—all that was best in England—was full of what America calls uplift: men would have sacrificed themselves gladly; women, too. The slacker was despised, the profiteer was without honor, and the conscientious objector was looked upon as a fanatical egoist with cold feet. Adrian's commanding officer was an en-

thusiast, and the majority of his subalterns had acquired the same spirit. Sometimes, when lying on his camp-bed in a drafty tent that he shared with two of his brother subalterns, he would wonder at his own enthusiasm. It seemed absurd that he, the fastidious Adrian St. Clair, a man who prided himself on his ability to ignore all that was unpleasant, irritating, or uncomfortable, whose catch-phrase was, "It is n't *my* pidgin," who had made almost a religion of minding his own affairs and never interfering with other people's, who had been content to live his life in his own way, who had never known what it was to lack anything essential to his own comfort, should be taking almost miraculous trouble to fit himself into the new career he had chosen voluntarily, and to prove himself worthy to lead his men into action.

On leaving the comforts of Hill Street, he had said to Drusilla: "Don't worry, old thing! The war will be over by Christmas!" But after a few weeks his opinions had changed. The life, though strenuous, was healthy; he felt amazingly fit. He went through that horrible winter without even acquiring a cold. In the old days, shooting in wet weather was a form of sport that failed to appeal to him; he preferred a game of bridge in a well-warmed library. But by the January of 1915 he thought nothing of tramping knee-deep in mud, soaked to the skin, through lanes, over wind-swept downs—

just as though he belonged to such a life. The narrow camp-bed, insecure, uncomfortable, and the lack of wardrobe accommodation, were matters of no account. But he chose his batman carefully and trained him thoroughly. Consequently, Adrian's uniform always looked smart. His natural instinct for tidiness became a tremendous asset.

The addition of a second star to his tunic was an event. Adrian St. Clair, the pride of Saville Row, the perfect dancer, the ornament of White's, the Marlborough, and the Bachelors', was dead; and Lieutenant St. Clair of Kitchener's army reigned in his stead.

And then he began to take an interest in his men, not as units, but as individuals. They were a heterogeneous crowd comprising all types and classes. At first, among themselves, they laughed at him for his spick and span appearance and his, to them, fussy and fastidious ways. Later on, they accepted him on his own merits. Whatever happened, they knew he would be just. He gave no favors and accepted none. He made no favorites. If he gave a decision, he stuck to it. If a man was dirty or untidy, punishment followed, until the man in question realized the futility of his conduct and either went sick or reformed. Before long, Adrian's platoon was the smartest on parade; its shooting and its bayonet drill won commendation from the powers that be; and its crimes-sheet was almost virgin.

"St. Clair 's so damned conscientious, and the men seem to like being bathed and dressed and having their nails trimmed," remarked the second in command to the C.O. when they were as usual discussing the welfare of the regiment and wondering when they would get their chance for overseas service.

"I 've recommended him for his company," replied the C.O. "He 'll probably come back as a brigadier—if he *does* come back."

But after the regiment reached France, Adrian's personal ambitions faded. The thing was too big for a man to have time to think of his own advancement. Looking after the men was a far more important affair. As a company commander his authority increased with his responsibility. Sometimes at night—in the trenches—he would talk to various individuals, ask after their personal affairs, and receive confidences that a year ago would have made him squirm. Class pride is a strange and wonderful thing. Every man in Adrian's company would cheerfully have given his life for his leader, but to give a personal confidence—to talk without reserve—was paying Adrian the greatest compliment a man of breeding and education can receive. He learned many curious histories, was introduced to phases of life of which he had hitherto been in utter ignorance. There were men in his company who knew the underworld intimately, had been born and brought up in that mysterious labyrinth that lies

east of Aldgate: thieves, the children of thieves, petty thieves, pickpockets, burglars, toughs of every description, dangerous in their own element, but with curiously normal ideas, aspirations, prejudices, appetites. They had joined up, they scarcely knew why; they had no stake in the country; life had been for them one long duel with law and order. And yet the abstract idea of England meant something to them; or perhaps it was the ingrained dislike of the Londoner—by no means shared by his north-country brothers—for those “bleedin’ Germans” who spoiled the labor market and “made a ruddy nuisance of themselves.”

Adrian had ten days’ leave in 1917. He returned to his regiment, wondering. Drusilla had been pleased to see him; she had met him with the car at Victoria Station, had suggested a warm bath and a change of raiment. It had been topping to get into evening-clothes, to dine at the Ritz, to go to a theater; even the darkened streets had seemed of little moment. The privations the civil population had been forced to endure had been no doubt very arduous; but, after all, Adrian himself had been compelled to endure one or two, so had his men; and the wail of the fat citizen at being deprived of his butter seemed to strike the comic note. No; it was not the hysterical, rumor-drinking, revue-worshiping London that had given him his chief shock. It was Drusilla herself, her attitude, her de-

tachment, her lack of interest in the stories he told her of his men. She shuddered at some of them. Adrian was very apologetic; he had forgotten her dislike of unpleasant things. From reading the newspapers, he had gathered that the fires of war had scorched all the superficial silliness out of the British people, that they had become everything that was noble and great: barring, of course, certain politicians holding opposite views from those newspapers in question. But Drusilla apparently had not altered at all; she was just as sweet, just as gracious, just as beautiful, just as impersonal. And Adrian was deeply, madly, passionately in love with her. He realized that he had never really been in love with her before; at any rate, not in the same way as he was now. He loved her; he wanted to tell her so, to keep on telling her. He wanted to hold her in his arms, to kiss her lips, her eyes, her hair. He had suddenly become possessive, perhaps a little elemental. After all, he had been living an elemental life.

And he frightened Drusilla; he could see the fear in her eyes. She shrank from him, not meaning to, probably; but the shrinking was unmistakable. Perhaps he had grown rough; or perhaps Drusilla had become used to being a grass-widow and preferred that state.

Whatever the cause might be, the result was unavoidable. Adrian became a visitor in his own

house and slept in the dressing-room. He felt like a swimmer who dives into a blue and sparkling sea only to find the water icy cold.

During the long journey in the leave-train, while kicking his heels at the Officers' Club at Boulogne, even as he crossed that narrow streak of channel that separates the county of Kent from the Pas de Calais, he was anticipating the rapture of his home-coming, anticipating the thrill of finding Drusilla in his arms, wondering how he should tell her just exactly what she had come to mean to him, how different their life was going to be "after the war." The rush through the late dusk to London, past darkened stations and towns, seemed interminable. As the train drew in at the platform, fussily saluting Victoria Station, his head was outside the window, his eyes searching for his wife's figure.

She accepted his kiss politely, and asked if he had any luggage.

In the car, he took her hand in his and squeezed it. He was realizing a dream; but she was awakening him to realities. It was almost like meeting a stranger.

He returned to France, depressed, moody, perplexed. When his next period of leave was due, he spent most of it with Pamela, taking her to dances and to theaters. Drusilla approved his detached attitude even while she resented it.

Pamela was then twenty, modern, restless, with a

curiously potent personality, picturesque and attractive; she was furious with Drusilla for being so unresponsive and did not hesitate to express herself. Adrian's manner to her was chivalrous and perfect. Pamela was a delightful companion, a trifle possessive, perhaps, but thoroughly stimulating. When Adrian went back to France, Pamela became rather silent. She realized that, in her pity for Adrian, she had let herself go further than she had intended. Being a philosopher—the modern girl had to acquire philosophy during the war—she accepted the fact that she was very fond of Adrian and continued to make the best of things that came her way.

But to Drusilla that ten days' leave had been something of a tragedy. She had discovered herself, and the discovery hurt her. She realized that her upbringing had made it almost impossible for her to show herself to Adrian as she really was; that, though she longed for his love and wanted it, she had lost the ability to make him understand this; that her timidity and reticence were ruining her happiness; that her husband was slipping away from her, and that she had no power to draw him back; that her own fastidiousness had rendered her impotent to express herself.

When Adrian came back after the armistice, life—on the surface—went on much as before. But Drusilla herself realized the difference. So did Adrian.

The condition of things in England was scarcely restful. Reaction had set in; discontent was rampant. The long torture of the peace conference was having its effect. Human nature appeared at its worst. Instead of strength, our rulers showed incredible weakness; they quarreled, grasped at everything, while they disregarded their obligations to their late allies. The ungloved claw of the financial magnate held our representatives in its grip. Our financiers had interests in Germany; many of them were buying marks. "Be kind to Germany!" was their cry. "Be just to France!" was whispered by only a few. Instead of punishing the criminal nation that had tried to conquer the world, our rulers bought whitewash by the ton and used it unsparingly. An orgy of extravagance was indulged in. The country had lost its sense of proportion. It did n't know what was going to happen and cared less. The average individual went crazy. Humbug flourished. We had been tricked. Instead of finishing our job, we had stopped—at the bidding of our politicians. Chaos was the result. Germs of revolt bred lustily. Scarcely any one was normal.

Adrian was in a curiously flabby mental condition. Sometimes while standing at the window of his luxurious library he would be overcome by a sudden desire to go out and hit a policeman. It was a kind of elemental revolt against too much discipline. There were many rebels in those days, but his partic-

ular rebellion was against the discipline imposed upon him by his own chosen line of conduct concerning his relations with Drusilla. Each had apparently accepted the fact that they must live a more or less detached existence; each resented the other's acceptance. They drifted; such drifting was dangerous. Drusilla became more and more impersonal, Adrian more and more exasperated. Pamela tumbled to what was going on and longed to shake Drusilla out of her detachment.

"Something's got to be done," muttered Adrian to himself as he lounged in a comfortable easy-chair in the smoking-room of one of his clubs. It was a large club, frequented by prosperous professional men—doctors, scientists, authors, bishops, lawyers, men who had reached the top of the tree, whose words carried weight. Adrian had been elected on the strength of his Oxford reputation. He had chosen it on this particular day because he desired solitude; his other clubs would have been full of men he knew, men of his own class and circumstances. The talk would have got on his nerves. In this club, as a rule, no member spoke except under severe provocation. At least, so he had understood—before the war. Evidently the war had altered the character of this famous club. New blood had been admitted. Besides, in 1919 every one was talking, and the noise was deafening.

He listened to the conversation of two elderly

men—one of them a well-known journalist, the other a famous specialist on neurasthenia and its attendant ailments—a rival of Sir Theodore Rolls. Adrian scarcely realized that he was listening at first, but gradually the monotonous burden of sound penetrated his mind, and he listened with some interest.

"Human nature works in waves," the specialist was saying; "the upward constructive wave, the downward iconclastic wave. We build for the future—a century of progress, of careful, methodical, unselfish work, and then we go crazy, and destroy it in a night. Action and reaction; that's how life functions. The child building a house of bricks, and then—pht!—he knocks it down and builds something different. That's what the world is doing to-day. We're all on strike against the normal."

Adrian was struck by the phrase; it echoed his own thoughts. Or was it, after all, the abnormal that we resented—the abnormal that was being accepted in place of the normal?

"Quite," agreed the journalist.

"Egotism is at the root of all evils," continued the specialist, "and the law is the apotheosis of egotism. Half a dozen clever men say, 'Thou shalt not!' to the rest of their countrymen, who have to pay up and look pleasant."

"Egotism," said the journalist, "is a comic tendency taken seriously."

"The original egotist was the first man who praised God for having made him, and then promptly invented the devil to excuse his sins," murmured the specialist reflectively.

The journalist chuckled. "In a lifetime devoted to flattering the public, it's a relief occasionally to hear the truth without camouflage," he remarked.

"If you had my job," replied the specialist, "you'd learn something of human nature and its idiosyncrasies. I don't blame people for being what they are; I merely pity them. Most of us are the results of our environment. You journalists who share with the revue producers the onus of creating public taste are responsible for a good deal of the present unrest. Too much rush, too much frazzle, too much amusement, too little thought, too much playing tricks with nature. . . . That's what the world's suffering from!"

"Would you condemn a man for being a slave, instead of a master, to some physiological idiosyncrasy?" inquired the journalist.

The specialist shook his head. "You can't condemn a man for being born an egotist," he said. "If we all lived according to the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, I should have to look for another job."

"Quite!" replied the journalist. "But egotism and a good press-agent have sent many a hustler to the House of Lords."

"If a man is dissatisfied with his lot," said the specialist, glancing at his watch and rising, "he should comfort himself with the reflection that it might be a good deal worse. Most nervous diseases arise from the fact of having too little to do and too much time to think about it. If the leisured classes were conscripted for national service, there would be a slump in nursing-homes. The man who works hard rarely has time to be ill. It's your chronic idler and amusement-seeker who experiments with all the new diseases. . . . If I were drifting into discontent, I should go down into the East End and study life in the raw."

He made his way to the door and disappeared, little realizing that his suggestion had stimulated a fellow-member of the club to make an experiment, that his half-facetious remark had disturbed a dormant desire for the elemental as an antidote to too much conventional respectability.

Adrian sometimes looked back on that conversation as a mile-stone in his life. . . .

CHAPTER III

IT was not only the suggestion that stimulated Adrian to make the experiment; the suggestion acted on his own thoughts, thoughts that had come to him during the long, weary hours of many sleepless nights. The door that separated his room from Drusilla's was an impassable barrier, a barrier that she herself had erected, that neither of them knew how to pull down. It was menacing their relations, their future; each realized that, but each seemed equally powerless to make the necessary effort. Hanging to the ever-revolving chain of thoughts were memories of little incidents, conversations. One conversation in particular came back to him, a conversation he had had with a man who was obviously suffering from a bad attack of cold feet, a poor devil who was obviously talking to keep up his courage. Adrian's platoon had suffered severely in a raid; he and this man lay all night in a shell-crater, waiting for the dawn, hoping to find their way back to their own trenches. The man had talked about his life in London. He had been a pickpocket; his home was somewhere near the Commercial Road. He described his life, his friends,

his vocation, intimately and without reserve. Adrian found it most interesting. "If yer wants ter 'it a bloke, yer jest 'it 'im, an' go on 'ittin', 'im until yer tired," explained the ex-pickpocket. "If a gal tykes yer fancy, yer sye, 'Come on!' And she says, 'Well, I dunno!' . . . An', there yer are. . . . 'T ain't sech a bad life, tykin' it orl rarnd."

Adrian reflected, argued with himself, felt the stimulus of curiosity, grew more restless, wanted something, could n't put a name to it. Drusilla would think him crazy if he took to slumming; he would be obliged to conjure up some sort of an excuse. Of course he might undertake voluntary work in some settlement. It was done. Lots of fellows had done it. But Adrian did n't want to teach; he desired to learn. There was discipline in a settlement, routine, probably prayer-meetings; and Adrian shrank from emotional religion. It was such bad form and was nothing but a form of hysteria. Besides, there would be parsons in the settlement, young parsons who combined facetiousness with fervor—the facetiousness of the very young undergraduate with the fervor of the fanatic. It would be far more amusing to join a gang of burglars or to gain admittance to an anarchist club. A settlement was too respectable; Adrian wished to take his dose of the underworld neat and undiluted. The more he thought about it, the more intriguing it seemed. Undoubtedly he was in an

abnormal state of mind; something had revolutionized his mentality. For a man who had never been anything but direct, he was showing signs of unbelievable cunning.

He would sit in his library, planning his campaign. He would be compelled to manufacture excuses. What sort of excuse would suffice? It was not so much the question of making Drusilla accept his excuse; the excuse must be sufficiently credible for his own acceptance. Why not golf? Golf covered a multitude of explanations.

He began to play golf fairly regularly; for several week-ends he went to Aldeburgh. Gradually it became an accepted fact that he was addicted to golf. The fixed idea in the house at Hill Street was that Adrian played golf at Aldeburgh; and, once the idea was established, there was no necessity for any further explanations.

Playing golf at Aldeburgh suggested the idea of keeping some rather disreputable-looking clothes in a suit-case at Liverpool Street Station; he could go there, change in one of the dressing-rooms, recheck the suit-case, and then he would be free to explore the unknown regions east of Aldgate.

This idea required thought, plans, scheming, subtlety. Working out the details was quite exciting; he felt like a chief of staff who was planning certain operations. It kept him amused. Meanwhile his golf improved. But in his ultimate

scheme, golf was an excuse, not a necessity. When the fact of his regularly visiting Aldeburgh had been indubitably established, taken for granted, and was no longer commented on—except by Pamela, who commented on most subjects—the time became ripe for cutting out Aldeburgh in favor of the Commercial Road.

The change on leaving the dressing-room was not sufficiently marked to cause comment; but once out in the semi-darkness of the streets, a few deft manœuvres altered his appearance in a surprising fashion. His usually neat hair became an untidy mop; his immaculate nails developed rough edges and mourning lines; with a scarf in place of his collar, he looked a tough. And his mental attitude assisted him. He *thought* himself into the character he was representing and was accepted without question.

This surrendering to an impulse, to hitherto unsuspected desires, puzzled Adrian; he tried to explain his own conduct to himself, but found it difficult. It was as though he were driven—driven by some power outside himself, some spiritual prompter; or else by some hidden personality, until then dormant. Psychologists asserted that there were two natures in every man: an objective nature which was normal, a subjective nature which was abnormal. One governed the man as his friends knew him; the other governed that part of him

that only he himself dimly suspected. Perhaps they were right. It might be that the elemental brute that is in every man was growing stronger in his particular case than its more disciplined twin brother; that by partially surrendering to the desires of his subconscious mind, by giving them a more suitable environment for action, he was playing its game, treading the path that might lead to disaster. Yet he seemed powerless to resist, impotent to discipline those cravings for some strange form of expression for which he could not find a name. There was an excitement about taking on a new personality; it was like some risky adventure—an adventure that might lead him anywhere—to some goal he could not as yet visualize. But that curious feeling of inevitability, that sense of being driven by some unknown power, was with him all the time. The mysterious land he was exploring, so near to and yet so alien from that rigid square mile that had always been the center of his universe, fascinated him; it was sordid, squalid, ugly, dirty, noisy. Figures stepped out of the gloom, menacing, marked by poverty, drink, or disease, as ships pass one another in a fog. Garbage lay in the gutters, fetid, decaying, odorous. Voices, shrill and gruff, whining and defiant, strident and fearful, assailed his hearing. The banging and rattling of heavy motor-lorries, the grinding brakes of the motor omnibus, the raucous cry of the hawker, and—most arresting of all

—the sirens of the incoming or outgoing steamers in the river—were to him like the burden of a great orchestra; they held him spellbound, listening to the complicated symphony played by odd musicians without a musical director's guidance. And there were dark places—dimly lighted courts and alleys, grimly reticent side streets, silent, ghostly places no visitor from the West End could safely traverse unguarded by police; but in his new personality he was safe—as safe as his bare fists and his knowledge of wrestling could make him.

In a way it reminded him of a crazy private endeavoring to give an imitation of the goose-step in Jerry's front-line trenches. But he who as Adrian St. Clair had never stepped outside the normal was in his new personality glorying in his pilgrimage to the abnormal. At first he spoke little; he was training his ear to the *nuances* of the various dialects. After a time, as an actor, putting on the clothes belonging to the part he was representing, moves and speaks as the character represented, so Adrian built up the personality of "Jim Higgins," the name he had chosen for his masquerade. Forgetting the ordinary clipped speech and musical intonation of the educated man, he cultivated his chest-notes, assumed a rough directness of speech, and gradually added those little touches that built up and exploit a personality.

One should picture him with a slight stoop and

a cultivated slouch, hands in pockets, a fag drooping from the corner of his mouth, a cap on the back of his head, hair unbrushed, roughly clothed, a black cloth scarf round his neck, and an air of detachment by no means uncommon in a society where every one is fighting for a bare existence, some honestly, some otherwise. And again one should picture him returning from Liverpool Street, entering the hall at Hill Street, changing into immaculate evening-clothes, and playing host to those of his own world; the last man who would have been suspected of leading a double life. Yet underneath it all the fearful risk of being found out. . . .

And Drusilla, realizing that Adrian was slipping further and further away from her, impotent to call him back, fighting her own fastidiousness, hating herself for her inability to throw off the life-choking tentacles of her training, though she hid these things in her heart, grew more and more silent. "A passionless abstraction," Pamela had called her. But Drusilla knew that this was not true. She was beginning to realize the difficulty of retracing a step once taken, of making herself understood without the gift of expression. She was very unhappy.

It is necessary to know what led Adrian into these strange paths in order to understand the sequel. He tried to explain it all to himself in order to find

the right excuses; after a time he gave up explaining and rejected excuses. That, had he realized it, connoted another mile-stone on the descent from the normal. Only once did he explain things to another person, and that was due to an accident.

An overworked but sociologically inclined general practitioner, who for some obscure reason had put up his plate on a small house in a dismal side street in the neighborhood of the Commercial Road, happened to drop in for a chat with a friend who was in charge of the old Wykehamist Settlement; the friend was out, but a young clergyman who was working at the settlement asked the doctor to come in, gave him a whisky and soda, pushed over a tin of tobacco, poked the fire—for the November evening was raw and chilly—and began to talk about his work. "You meet some rum chaps in this part," he asserted. "All sorts and conditions. It's frightfully interesting."

Dr. Munro lit his pipe, sipped the whisky, and agreed.

"I've been attending a man down in Parker's Court," he said.

The clergyman nodded. He knew Parker's Court—one of the most unsavory places in an unsavory district.

"This chap has had a bad fall," continued the doctor. "Fell down some stairs with a great hefty Irishman on top of him. They were having a scrap.

He's pretty badly knocked about. It's a marvel he did n't break anything. I thought you might like to drop in and visit him."

"Is he alone?" inquired the Rev. Eustace Hillingdon.

Dr. Munro hesitated. "There's a girl there nursing him. Has n't taken her clothes off for a week. I fancy she was the cause of the row. Anyway, this fellow could n't have been better looked after. I suppose they're living together," he concluded, relighting his pipe.

"Shall I offer to lend him a book or write letters for him?" inquired Eustace.

"That's what I was going to suggest," replied Munro. "You know, Hillingdon, he's—he's a bit out of the ordinary. I should say he was a gentleman who's come a cropper. Been wounded, too. Scar's still there. He—he interested me . . . Does n't say a word about himself, and the girl obviously knows very little about him. . . . Wonder what brought that kind of chap down to this sort of thing."

"What's his name?" asked Eustace, taking out a small note-book.

"Higgins," said Munro. "First floor of No. 13, Parker's Court. . . . The fellow asked me how much he owed me, and insisted on paying. . . . There are n't many like that," he added with a chuckle.

Munro, who disliked fervid religious enthusiasm (who could be fervidly religious and remain sincere in such a neighborhood?), was nevertheless rather partial to the Rev. Eustace Hillingdon. Eustace was the essence of simplicity, eager, anxious to help any one needing help. Four and a half years as a padre in France had taught him something of the brotherhood of man. He realized that the great majority upon whom the gods rarely smiled needed practical help in the present far more than visionary promises for the future. It was difficult to explain the wisdom of Providence to the submerged; and he was wise enough not to attempt it. He was an optimist and always saw the best in every one. He was also an exponent of muscular Christianity and had taken lessons from an ex-champion light-weight; his present occupation made such a precaution necessary. Though somewhat on the ascetic side, his muscles were of iron. He lived frugally, rarely visited the West End, and smoked an old battered brier pipe. He was ashamed of his own sermons and rarely preached unless compelled to. His dogma was unorthodox, but his sympathy boundless.

He had many friends among the criminal classes and could traverse the most dangerous slums without misadventure. He was without fear and without self-consciousness. Only in his rare moments of leisure did he pause to wonder whether he served any useful purpose.

His father owned some of the slums; the knowledge of this made Eustace ashamed. . . .

About six months previously, Adrian, riding in a crowded tram-car, found himself standing next to a girl who, unconscious of observation, had manœuvered her hand into the open hand-bag of a woman, strap-hanging, and engrossed in conversation with a female friend. The girl's fingers had grasped a purse when she felt an iron clutch on her arm and heard a voice whispering in her ear: "Nix on that!"

She withdrew her hand from the bag, and, turning on Adrian with flashing eyes, whispered, "What the hell 's it got to do with *you*?"

Adrian, pleasantly surprised by her intonation, kept his hand on her arm.

"Are you in the Salvation Army?" she muttered.

"No," replied Adrian under his breath; "but that bloke over on the other side 's watching you. Look at his boots. . . . Plain-clothes detective."

"Much obliged," murmured the girl. "Do the same for you one o' these days."

She smiled at him, and Adrian thought her smile one of the most exquisite things he had ever seen. Her eyes were gray, her skin pale, almost creamy, her features regular, her radiant red-gold hair bobbed. She was of medium height, slim, graceful in her movements; and, though her clothes were of

cheap material, she wore them as though they were part of her. She had full red lips, tragic eyes, and an undoubted flair for color. She reminded Adrian of a picture he had once seen in the Paris Salon—haunting, arresting, almost insolent in its truth. And her voice was musical, though her speech was careless. That she neither dropped her aitches nor spoke with a cockney twang was a miracle. "Who on earth can she be?" wondered Adrian. "Must be a throw-back. . . . Touch of Latin blood for certain . . . or Celtic."

She alighted at the next corner. Adrian followed her. "Going my way?" she inquired.

Adrian nodded.

"Bad luck if I'd been pinched to-day," she remarked. "Bill, my brother, he was pinched Tuesday. Six months he got. But Bill, well, he asked for it. Has n't got no sense. . . . Sneakin' milk-cans from outside doors. Made such a noise the cop woke up an' pinched him."

"Live around here?" inquired Adrian.

She nodded. "Parker's Court. Ever been there?"

"I know it," replied Adrian.

They walked on in silence. The girl put her hand on Adrian's arm just as they were approaching a public house into which a man was making his way. "What is it?" inquired Adrian.

"See that chap goin' into the bar?" she asked.

"Who is he?"

"His name's Herb Harris." She shivered slightly.

"Hefty beggar," remarked Adrian. "Should n't care to have a row with him."

"No," said the girl. "You keep out of his way. Herb Harris ain't exactly sociable."

They reached the entrance to Parker's Court. "Well, see you again some day p'r'aps," she said.

Adrian reflected. "Ever go to the pictures?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. "Sometimes."

"What about to-morrow?" inquired Adrian.

"Right-o," said the girl.

"Meet you here at five o'clock," suggested Adrian. "What's your name?"

"Vicky," she replied.

"All right! I'm Jim Higgins. . . . Good night, Vicky!"

"Good night, Jim."

She disappeared into the alley that led to the court. Adrian turned west and made his way towards Aldgate.

They met regularly and became great friends. Adrian's air of detachment, his reticence, appealed to the girl. She thought about him a great deal.

Adrian was interested in Vicky as a type, afterward as a woman. He knew he was playing a dangerous game, dangerous to himself, dangerous

to Vicky; but again he had that curious consciousness of being driven—driven by something intangible, as though he were fulfilling his destiny. Drusilla was the magnet drawing him back to everything he loved and valued, but Vicky appealed to something in him that he himself could not explain. After seeing her he would make a resolution to end this at present harmless episode. But somehow he found himself drifting back, his resolution weakening, to the fascination of his other personality. He drifted, and allowed himself to drift, was almost content to drift. He had moments of reaction, of revolt from the idea of an intrigue; moments when he hated the whole thing, hated himself. He was still holding on to the rope, but his grip was less sure.

Following his wild waves of revolt came baffling and terrible desires, partly sensual, partly savage. He wanted Vicky, not because he loved her, but because she was a woman—young, beautiful, without reticence, eminently desirable. He loved Drusilla, loved her passionately. This other madness had no connection with love. He was sure of that. It was the animal in him, the animal that most men keep chained and muzzled. And yet, when in company with Vicky, he seemed to lose all longing for her. He was fond of her; chivalrous, kind, in his dealings. It was in the lonely hours of the night that the animal stirred in its sleep.

He was so much occupied with his own mental

condition that he failed to observe hers. He did not realize that he was making her conspicuous. Vicky wondered at his ignorance of life, though she was entirely callous regarding scandal. Whatever a girl did, people would talk. If Jim did n't mind, well—why worry because a few hens cackled? And Herb Harris, who had uttered unpleasant and quite unjustifiable threats, was safely put away for seven years.

And then one evening when will had surrendered to desire, he went to Parker's Court, careless of the consequences, and hearing voices from the second-floor landing—an altercation between Vicky and Cassidy, the red-faced, hairy-armed, bullying Irishman who lived with a girl on the floor above Vicky's—he mounted the stairs, and, hearing Cassidy let fly an epithet that caused him to see red, Adrian let out with his right, just on the point of Cassidy's jaw. Cassidy roared like a bull, threw himself on Adrian, and, fighting like savages, both men fell down the rickety stairs, Adrian underneath.

Vicky screamed. Adrian made no movement. "Sarve the divil right," muttered Cassidy. "What'll we do with him?"

Together they carried the unconscious Adrian into Vicky's room and put him to bed. Cassidy, en route for his favorite house of call, paused for a moment to ask Dr. Munro to look in, then forgot the episode.

Vicky nursed Adrian night and day until the Doctor proclaimed him convalescent. In Hill Street it was understood that Adrian was away playing golf.

And all this time Drusilla was suffering, suffering acutely. She felt Adrian slipping away from her and could do nothing to call him back. She knew instinctively that he was restless and unsatisfied, but was aware to a humiliating degree of the fact that she herself had not the power to rest him or to satisfy him. She longed for his confidence but had not the courage to ask for it.

The whole thing seemed vague, illusive, unreal; she felt that she would almost welcome something concrete even though it brought definite loss and unhappiness to herself, even though it meant permanent separation from Adrian.

One evening when dining with some friends, Adrian being away playing golf, her dinner-partner happened to mention Aldeburgh. "It's a dreary spot," he explained. "Beastly cold, permanent east wind and all that, and the hotels are the limit. Stodgy cooking and old-fashioned rooms. But the doctor recommended the east coast for my kiddies—so we went to Aldeburgh, the whole lot of us. I'd tried Frinton, but there were too many cabinet ministers. One has to draw the line somewhere. I stayed at Aldeburgh for a couple of months,

played golf every day. Some day," he added, savagely attacking a *vol-au-vent*, "some day I'm going to meet the doctor who sent us to the east coast and tell him my frank opinion of his prescription."

"I wonder if you met my husband?" inquired Drusilla. "He plays golf at Aldeburgh regularly."

The man shook his head. "No," he replied. "He was n't there in September and October. If he had been, I should have been bound to run across him. It's a one-horse village."

And yet Adrian was apparently the last man in the world to tell a gratuitous lie. Why should he say he was going to Aldeburgh and then go somewhere else? What was the reason for all this mystery? What was the attraction that drew him away from her, out of her influence, to some unknown destination? Why should he deceive her like this? Why could n't he be frank and tell her the truth? How had they drifted into such a disastrous impasse?

The effect of this disclosure was to drive her more and more into herself; she carried on mechanically, hiding her secret knowledge, apparently complete mistress of herself. She knew that Adrian was unhappy; she could read it in his eyes. She longed to put her arms round him, to draw his head on to her breast, to beg him to tell her all, to come back to her. She began to hate her primly perfect

bedroom, her perfectly ordered house, her cupboards full of clothes, her rows of shoes, slippers, boots, her exquisite underwear, and her priceless furs. She felt marooned—alone on a desert island, a solitary pedestrian groping in a fog. Her head ached; her limbs were weary; her sleepless nights tired her out; her brain went round and round; she could come to no conclusion, find no answer to the problem. She almost wished she had Pamela's undisciplined impulses. Pamela threw herself at Adrian, gave away her devotion to him at every turn. It was harmless and rather pathetic. But Drusilla herself failed to make Adrian understand that he had but to ask to receive. Her reticence had become part of her; her impersonal graciousness seemed that of an automaton. She hated herself for her covering of ice.

Sir Theodore Rolls had listened politely to her tale of chronic insomnia, had chatted pleasantly, and then advised a change to the Riviera and a regular course of mustard-baths. But the idea of going to the south of France without Adrian was abhorrent to her. And she could not bring herself to ask him to go with her. She knew he would go; but she was certain he would go unwillingly. She did not want to accept favors; she wanted to give them. She longed to give, and to go on giving—to Adrian. She did not recognize herself in this attitude. She had been trained to accept, to demand, to acquiesce

politely. She had never been trained to surrender. Her teachers had been worldly-wise to a criminal extent. The comfortably situated people of her little corner of the world were rarely altruistic. They had created conventions that they themselves rigidly adhered to. To rebel was to rank oneself as unclassed. It was treachery to wander outside the code, and her world could forgive much but not treachery. Social sins were more deadly than ethical ones. To discuss anything but superficialities was forbidden. The whole fabric of the social order was woven in threads of unrealities. To pick it to pieces and to analyze the threads would lead to revolution. A sense of proportion was not included in the mental equipment of the county families. A sense of proportion would wreck the whole edifice. Drusilla was deeply shocked at some of her own conclusions.

Meanwhile she entertained and was entertained; she visited her dressmaker, left cards on her friends, attended concerts and theaters, read through some carefully selected works of fiction and the reminiscences of her friends—and endeavored to carry on as usual.

But she was very lonely.

CHAPTER IV

ADRIAN—or rather Jim Higgins, by which name he was known east of Aldgate—fully dressed, lay asleep on a narrow truckle-bed in a dingy room on the first floor of No. 13, Parker's Court. The gloom of a November evening filled the court outside and permeated the room itself. There was a feeble attempt at a fire in the small, old-fashioned grate. In addition to the bed, the furniture consisted of a table, covered by a chenille cloth, two kitchen chairs, a few cooking-utensils, and a small cupboard to hold crockery. The floor was well scrubbed and swept, though the window which overlooked the narrow court could have survived a cleaning. In the distance a piano-organ functioned drearily. The roar of the traffic a hundred yards away persisted steadily.

Adrian stirred in his sleep; he was restless, he muttered to himself, gave a deep sigh, then his breathing became more regular. A coal dropped from the grate; a cheap American clock on the mantelpiece ticked aggressively. From the court came the voices of women quarreling. The hoot from the horn of a passing motor-lorry, thundering

along the busy thoroughfare into which Parker's Court opened, and the clanging bell of a tram-car, sounded menacing and curiously depressing. There was an atmosphere of drab poverty, of hopeless struggle against gigantic and overwhelming forces, of revolt, despair, of utter futility. It was like a city of lost souls, wandering without purpose in the Cimmerian gloom.

Footsteps on the crazy, rickety stairs—stairs that creaked, rebelled, complained, stairs that had been trodden by the weary feet of the unclassed, stumbled up by the drunken, climbed heroically by the halt, the maimed, and the blind—introduced a new note into the blatantly monotonous symphony; they suggested lightness, eagerness, youth. Stimulating footsteps. The door was flung open, and Vicky entered, breathless, carrying a string bag that contained a bloater, a small packet of tea, a cake of soap, and other odds and ends. She closed the door quietly, placed her bag on the table, then crept noiselessly over toward the bed, listened intently to the sleeper's regular breathing; then, returning to the table, she sat down, with her back to the window, gazing into the distance, elbows on the table, chin on hands, a curious, inscrutable smile playing round her lips.

Vicky was twenty, though in the semi-darkness she looked even younger; her creamy skin made a wonderful background to her full red lips. Her mouth was exquisite, her teeth white and well kept; she

looked picturesque even in her cheap and shabby clothes which, nevertheless, she knew how to put on and how to wear. They were carefully chosen regarding color—striking, arresting. She had a natural eye for color, an instinctive taste for selection. Velásquez would have rendered her immortal—he would have seen the intensely vital personality, destined for sorrow; Goya would have made her laugh to conceal her tears—laugh defiantly, arrogantly, contemptuously; Greuze would have made her provocative; Romney would have seen in her another Lady Hamilton. Her haunting eyes, tragic, inscrutable; her lithe, slim figure, not over-sexed, with its exquisite curves and perfect modeling—modeling that called for bold and determined lines, nothing finicky or timid, with its unconsciously graceful movements; her long, well-shaped hands; her red-gold bobbed hair; her picturesque, haunting personality, passionate, tragic—would have appealed, stimulatingly, to the creative instinct in any great artist. Phil May would have drawn her as a Madonna of the gutter—vivid, arresting. But she could not actually be associated with the gutter. She belonged to herself, to her type—a type that has persisted, according to history, legend, folk-lore, throughout the ages. Her voice was low, never strident; there was passion in it, even tragedy, and a suggestion of grim humor—the humor that knows the worst of life and recognizes the irony of facts. Her speech,

though ungrammatical, careless, slipshod, was very little marred by the hideousness of the true cockney accent. There was a slight drawl, occasionally, to emphasize a point; but the vibrations of her notes were musical, true, appealing. There was unconscious sex-attraction in everything she did.

Seated at the ugly table, with her elbows on the cloth, her chin cupped in her hands, with the firelight on her face, she might have been painted under the title of "Waiting."

Presently, Adrian opened his eyes, turned, gazed at her for a moment, a little bewildered; then his memory functioned, and he lifted himself on his elbow to greet her.

In the character of Jim Higgins, he was detached, reticent, a trifle mysterious, direct in speech, belonging to his surroundings yet superior to them mentally; his roughness was balanced by the subtle attraction of his personality.

Obviously a man who knew his own mind, the dominating type, direct, elemental; in curious contrast to the Adrian St. Clair of Hill Street.

"Doctor say anything?" inquired Vicky anxiously, turning as she heard the movement on the bed.

Adrian nodded. "Said I was all right."

Vicky rose and went over to him. "Said you might put your clothes on?"

"Yes," replied Adrian. "Told me to go out and get a breath of air."

Vicky frowned. "You're not strong enough," she protested.

"*I'm* all right," he asserted.

Adrian was worried. It was Friday, getting on for six o'clock. He had left Hill Street on the previous Friday, having mentioned an appointment to play golf at Aldeburgh, intending to return on the Monday. But the fracas on the stairs that same evening, and the subsequent necessity for being nursed and medically attended, had upset his calculations considerably. Drusilla would have been perplexed by his failure to return, anxious, perhaps even suspicious. One of his first actions on the recovery of his consciousness had been to inclose a stamped telegraph-form, addressed to Drusilla, explaining that he had been persuaded to remain at Aldeburgh for the week, and promising to be home to dinner on Friday, under cover to the postmaster at Aldeburgh, trusting that the wire would reach its destination. It was now Friday; he was due at Hill Street not later than seven; he knew that Lady Rolls and her husband, and probably Sir Felix Sladen, were dining there; and how was he to get away, to explain to Vicky without explaining, to keep his promise to Drusilla without arousing suspicion or resentment in Vicky? Yet he must go; it was a vital necessity. It was impossible to put Vicky off with any unconvincing excuse. She was too mentally alert to be deceived.

And still more difficult was the necessity for an assertion of will-power. Lying in pain, with nothing to occupy his mind, his thought had been active. He had reviewed the whole situation, coldly, dispassionately, and had come definitely to the conclusion that he must break with Vicky and return to his normal life. He was drifting—perilously, and the cross-roads had been reached. What he was doing now was fair neither to Drusilla nor to Vicky; it was unfair to himself. He was slipping downhill; every fresh submission to impulse rendered his will weaker. He wanted Drusilla, craved her. Absent, she was to him everything that was satisfying. It was only in her actual presence that he felt the barrier. And still there was that other self—that unknown nature, insistent, pitiless; the undisciplined desire for danger; the animal unsatisfied. He must fight this driving force of suggestion—fight it day and night, conquer it. If it conquered him, his life was ruined, his self-respect forfeited, and for Drusilla would be left the shame of betrayal and exposure. Vicky had been good to him; she had devoted herself to his recovery. He was grateful. He was fond of her; in normal moments, he was full of affection for her. But there were other hours—hours when the subconscious self triumphed, when the animal, leering hideously, craved for gratification, when the impulse to take what was obviously his for the asking became almost insupportable; when sex

dominated and decency panted for breath, when Drusilla became an abstraction, unreal, belonging to another life, when only the present mattered, when desire shrieked, "Give in," and decency sobbed, "Farewell." He had fought, struggled, lost control, recovered it, and had emerged from the conflict, weak, worn, inert. He knew that each struggle became daily more acute, that he was in danger of submitting, that his one hope of victory was to avoid temptation. He had yielded to the desire for exploring the underworld; if he yielded to this other, far more insistent desire, it would be the beginning of the end. He must hurt Vicky to save her from himself; hurt her terribly; he must leave her—finally, forget her, cut her out of his life; hoping, praying, that she would accept the situation with philosophy. He hated to hurt her. But if it came to the point of choosing which he must hurt—Drusilla or Vicky—unquestionably Drusilla must stand first. Few men yield to desire easily, without a struggle, unless their egotism is greater than their instinct for decency. And yet nature, blind to everything but persistence of life, deadly when thwarted, had built man for a purpose, given him desires which only discipline could control. An army without discipline became a rabble; a man without discipline became a wild beast. Nature fought against discipline, man writhed under it; too much discipline destroyed life, too little destroyed man. It was

baffling, paradoxical. A man could think only of his own case, his own environment. To save his life from shipwreck, Adrian would have to call up his reserve of will-power; to protect Drusilla he must sacrifice Vicky. Destiny was ruthless, pitiless, logical. He had brought the problem on himself by his own folly, by yielding to impulse. The world—his world—could forgive almost anything but folly. The world always laughs at anything it is unable to understand.

"Thought you might fancy a bloater for your supper," remarked Vicky, unloading her bag. "Nicked it off a barrow," she added with some pride.

This peculiar delight in stocking her larder gratuitously was an ineradicable trait where Vicky was concerned. If you have been trained to steal from the cradle, if your ethics are sufficiently catholic to embrace stealing as a virtue, protests from one less broad-minded are merely superfluous. To Vicky, life was a long game of grab and snatch, in which the quick hand and ready eye won the prizes. To the victor belonged the spoils. Adrian had persuaded her to renounce the art of pocket-picking and bag-snatching; she had yielded to his persuasions, puzzled, marveling at his ignorance of economic conditions, but glad to oblige him. In her own opinion, she was a traitor to her upbringing for thus yielding to an illogical whim, but, being a woman, she was glad to sacrifice her means of livelihood in order to

win words of approval from the man she loved. Since she had undertaken to pick no more pockets, temptations had been strewn in her path; but she had resisted them all, and was a little proud of her own ability to keep a promise. She felt rather like a big hitter who had been sent in by a conscientious skipper with strict orders to play a stone-walling game and to leave loose balls alone. She obeyed orders, but deplored the waste of opportunity.

"Got a fag handy?" inquired Adrian.

Vicky handed him a packet of cigarettes and struck a match. He lit his cigarette and nodded his thanks.

"Why did n't you ask me for the money?" asked Adrian, lying back on the bed and appreciating the whiff of what was charitably referred to as tobacco.

"You've got such extravagant ideas," replied Vicky with a sigh.

Adrian blew the smoke through his nose. "I can afford to pay for what I eat," he asserted.

Vicky looked at him. "How?" she inquired, her eyes fixed on his. "You have n't done no work for more 'n a week; not since you smashed yourself up, fallin' down them stairs with that brute Cassidy on top of you."

Adrian chuckled. "Sixteen stone I reckon Cassidy must weigh," he speculated rather ruefully. "Sixteen stone—mostly bone and muscle."

"Must have nearly killed you," muttered

Vicky with a shiver. "And all on account of *me*. . . . 'Cos you wouldn't let him knock me about. . . . Oh, Jim!" she cried, her voice quivering; "I'll never forget that."

Adrian frowned. Vicky's gratitude was genuine, sincere; just as his gratitude to her for nursing him was genuine and sincere. But to voice one's thoughts in the present circumstances might lead to something that every effort should be made to avoid. It was very difficult to harden his heart and turn the conversation; difficult but necessary. Vicky was peculiarly quick in the uptake; she could read a man's mind.

"Give us a hand," said Adrian, preparing to rise.

"D' you think you ought to get up?" added Vicky doubtfully.

"I've *been* up," replied Adrian, "while you were out."

Vicky gasped, then her eyes exuded reproach.

"Had to do a bit of telephoning," explained Adrian.

Vicky assisted him to a chair by the table; he was stiff, his bones ached, and he felt a trifle unsteady on his legs. A life lived more or less in the open air had kept him fit, his four and a half years in France had hardened him. "I can walk all right," he said.

Like most men, he resented any interference with his liberty of action. To be fussed over by women might be pleasant, but it was at times exasperating.

A man should train himself to be a competent judge of his own limitations. He knew that he must be at Liverpool Street station by half-past six to retrieve his suit-case and to change his clothes, and that by seven o'clock he ought to be enjoying the warm, verbena-scented bath prepared for him by his man, before changing into conventional evening attire. The contrast between his own white-tiled bath-room and this present habitation was sufficiently marked to be humorous.

"You're not too steady on your pins," protested Vicky.

Adrian laughed. "You wait till I've had a square meal," he replied.

Vicky thought of the pilfered bloater and sighed. "Wish I could have done a bit more for you," she said. Woman-like, she longed to give. She was n't asking for thanks; she was genuine in her desire to place the world at Adrian's feet for him to wipe his boots on. Woman-like, she placed her man on a pedestal, knowing his weakness.

Adrian answered gruffly—to hide his feelings. "Have n't you nursed me, given up your own bed to me, looked after me like—" he paused for a moment—"like a sister," he concluded, realizing the ineptitude of the comparison.

"Like a sister," repeated Vicky, with unconscious irony. Then, with one of her rare and illuminating

smiles, "Well! what else could I do?" she protested. "Was n't it all my fault?"

She went over to the bed, which she began to strip. She wanted to turn her back in order to conceal the fact that she was struggling with a frantic desire to cry.

"We 're quits, anyway," asserted Adrian gruffly.

He flicked the ash from his cigarette to the floor and mechanically counted the holes in the carpet. Lately he had acquired the irritating habit of counting things—flies on the window-pane, stripes on the wall-paper, footsteps in the court; lying in bed, helpless, there was nothing else to do but count things. It tired the brain and yet stimulated it. Sometimes it seemed like the prelude to delirium. He had tried to conquer it, but the desire to count grew, became a habit—almost a fetish. Realizing this, he also realized that the origin of this idiosyncrasy was worry.

"I 've paid the doctor," Adrian remarked. "He is n't coming any more."

Vicky looked up and made a half-turn. "Paid him?" she repeated, frowning. "Where 'd you get the money?" she asked, puzzled.

Adrian gave a shrug. What would Vicky say if she discovered that he enjoyed an income that ran well into five figures? He had an intense desire to perform feats of mental arithmetic, to reckon his in-

come by the month, the week, the hour, the minute. Figures danced in his mind. It was with the greatest difficulty that he was able to answer her question. "Oh, I had a bit put away," he explained casually.

Vicky sighed and began to remake the bed. "I wish I knew more about you, Jim," she murmured.

"Why?" inquired Adrian, his faculties alert.

"Oh, I dunno," replied Vicky drearily. Then she smiled. "Nursing a feller makes you take a sort of interest in him," she explained.

Adrian frowned. He must pull himself together for the effort of saying good-by. If the thing were to be done, it should be done quickly; a hint must be given, an explanation manufactured, and then action would follow. He blew a ring of smoke and followed it with his eyes. "Doctor says I can hop it now," he remarked casually.

She looked up, a blanket in her hand, startled.

"About time, too," he added.

She dropped the blanket and came over to him. "Jim!" she cried. "You can't! You ain't strong enough!"

She had never for a moment been able to force herself to visualize such a catastrophe. During the nights she had spent in nursing him, attending to his wants, smoothing his pillow, giving him food, medicine, water, she had come to look upon him as her man—almost as her property. She was ready to marry him, or to live with him; it did n't

much matter which. But that he should go out of her life, return to that mysterious occupation concerning which she could merely surmise, about which she knew nothing definite, that this week spent together, he a helpless invalid, she a devoted nurse, should prove to be nothing but an incident, an interlude, was a monstrous thought, impossible to accept, incredibly cruel. Whatever he was, however he lived, she was ready to accept him, to share his risks. Perhaps, deep down in her heart, a voice had whispered to her that all this was only temporary; but she had steadfastly refused to listen. She had dreams; they were so impractical. She had pictured a life in some dimly imagined country, under blue skies (she had never seen a really blue sky), in sunshine (she had rarely seen the sun unobscured by smoke or mist), where flowers grew profusely (she had never seen wild flowers growing), where golden fruit hung invitingly from the trees, asking to be plucked. She had never seen the sea, but she had imagined it as a great splash of color—deep, deep blue, stretching to the horizon, dimly sensed, soothing, murmuring, restful. She had read of great forests of pine and larch and spruce; and she tried to imagine dim aisles, mauve splashed in the flickering sunlight, down which she and Jim would walk, peace in their hearts, fear vanquished, a thousand miles from the Commercial Road and all its sordid

pageantry. Perhaps her vision was a tiny gift from some former life, a reminder of nature's prodigality; or perhaps in sleep her soul traveled to the bourne of her dreams to gain refreshment, strength, courage, for the daily fight with destiny.

Adrian's answer shattered her dreams. "Got to," he said. "I've a job to attend to."

Vicky frowned. "What sort of job?" she asked.

"Never you mind," replied Adrian with that finality the women of Vicky's class had learned to expect and to respect.

Vicky hesitated. "You're not thinkin' of goin' away altogether, Jim?" she whispered.

Adrian shook his head. To tell the truth would be brutal; it would be worse than hitting her. She must be made to realize gradually that in future their ways would lie apart.

"I'll see you once a week, anyway," he said.

"Once a . . . week," muttered Vicky mechanically. "Once a week."

She returned to the bed and spread the blanket mechanically. "Once a week," she repeated, under her breath. "A lot can happen in a week, Jim," she continued, her voice low, vibrant, quivering; in her mind rebellion, in her heart fear. "Specially when I don't know where you go to—what you do—nothing. . . . You might get pinched," she added, suddenly turning to face him. There was a moment's silence. "Or *I* might," she added, with

a shrug, turning to complete the rehabilitation of the bed.

Adrian looked up. "Why?" he asked, a tinge of anxiety in his voice. "You don't do anything in that line *now?*"

"No," replied Vicky; "but I might. It's in my blood. I might n't be able to resist a chance." Then, noticing the perturbation in his eyes, "Oh, don't you worry!" she added despondently. "I'm not goin' to; not now as I know you're so keen on my runnin' straight."

She tried very hard to see his point of view but failed. He was a thief himself; he must be, or else he would have told her how he earned his living. But his operations were probably conducted on a bigger scale altogether than her own. Why should he object to her doing in her own small way what he accomplished in his much more risky game? Men were incomprehensible beings, logical concerning others, exasperatingly illogical concerning their own ambitions.

"Bill's comin' out to-day, Jim," she remarked, leaving the bed and sitting on the other side of the table, facing him.

"Well?" inquired Adrian. "What about it?"

Vicky gave a shrug and began to untie her parcels.

"He'll be sick as a dog when he finds out I'm on the level," she said. "Bill's about as lively as a dead bloater when he don't get what he wants."

"Tell Bill to mind his own business," replied Adrian authoritatively.

"Bill's my brother," explained Vicky without undue pride, for Bill was scarcely a relative to be proud of. "Him and me were brought up to steal. Dad was a thief; so was mother; so were their folks. It's in our blood. We never had nothing of our own, so we stole it. You've got some rum notions, Jim," she concluded, baffled, as so many of us are, by the other person's point of view. "Oh, but I'm glad the doctor says you're better," she cried passionately. Then, staring into the distance, "But you didn't ought to go so soon," she concluded lamely.

"That's all right," replied Adrian gruffly. "What's up?" he inquired, struck by the misery in her eyes.

"I dunno," said Vicky laconically. "Days'll seem so long when you're off somewhere," she added drearily. "'That's all!'"

Adrian rose, went over to the fireplace, and threw away his cigarette. "Would you miss me if I didn't come back for a long time?" he asked, his eyes intent on the smoldering fire, his brain mechanically counting the number of fire-bars.

"Miss you?" repeated Vicky, her voice quivering as she looked up, frightened. "Jim," she cried pleadingly, "you're not gettin' tired of me, are you?"

"Oh, chuck it!" exclaimed Adrian roughly—roughness being part of the character of Jim Higgins as conceived by Adrian. "What's wrong?" he inquired after a pause.

"I dunno," said Vicky. "Things has been different since I began to look after you. I can't help wonderin'——"

She broke off and switched to another subject, a habit common to her sex, especially when the subject in question is one that has been dominant though unspoken for some time. "I wish you had a job round here," she exclaimed.

Adrian frowned, his hands in his pockets, his eyes concentrated on the fire. "I can get better money where I'm going," he protested.

"Where's that?" inquired Vicky quickly.

"I told you not to ask questions," replied Adrian. Vicky pondered for a moment, her brain searching for reasons, her common sense rejecting them. "You ain't got another girl there, have you?" she asked.

"You make me tired," he protested.

"I did n't mean to offend you, Jim," she pleaded.

"That'll do, Vicky," said Adrian kindly. "Talk of something else," he suggested, returning to the table, seating himself, and tilting back in his chair as he watched her curiously.

Vicky made a conscientious effort to phrase her point of view. "I can't help feeling you sorter

belong to me," she explained, "in a way. When you was bad and could n't move without hurting yourself, and you was so helpless, and sorter depended on me for everything, I—well, I liked it, Jim! . . . In a way. . . . P'r'aps, bein' a man, you would n't understand."

She looked up at him eagerly, but saw nothing in his face but masculine lack of response, which checked her longing to confide, her desire to justify her vaulting ambition. Adrian's attitude scarcely encouraged her to pursue the subject. He had made no comment, but his face was expressive. Had he been pleased with her confession, he would have made some sign. Perhaps he resented her possessiveness. She gulped down her longing to confess and switched back to a previously broached subject. "I can't help wonderin' who you are, whatcher do—everything," she continued. "You tell me nothing—nothing. Oh! I know I've no claim on you," she added rather bitterly. Then her bitterness changed to helplessness. "But I can't help bein' jealous . . . in a way."

She went up to the window, turning her back on the room. At last she had acknowledged to him what she had hesitated to acknowledge to herself. She was jealous—jealous of his past, his present—that part of it of which she knew nothing, and of his future. She wanted to possess him—absolutely, completely; to possess his thoughts, his

dreams, his plans; to be the center of his world, the stimulus of his deeds, the magnet that drew him from the pullings and pushings of the world into her arms, to be rested, refreshed, strengthened. The mystery that surrounded him made him even more desirable; his reticence, too; his strength; his dominating personality. She realized that what he planned to do he would do, that no arguments would move him, no persuasions could turn him from his course; and she admired this strength of purpose even while she resented it. She would have been disappointed had he been easily swayed, had he bowed to her rulings, had he altered his decisions on her account. A woman can admire and resent some quality in a man at one and the same time; just as she can love and hate him simultaneously. Vicky was a woman; there was nothing of the man in her, either imitative or fundamental. Perhaps in that lay her supreme attraction for men. She was unconscious of this, unconscious even of her provocativeness. She had been brought up to realize that it was natural for a man to dominate a woman, natural for a woman to sacrifice herself for a man. She had been brought up to be contemptuous of a woman who nagged and to despise a man who fetched and carried. The women she had known looked upon a blow from the men they loved as a compliment, upon being knocked about by their husbands as part of the natu-

ral order of things. The women of fiction or the drama who held their husbands on a string were considered to be nothing but comic relief by Vicky's occasional friends. It was for the man to take, for the women to give; such was the natural order of things in her opinion. What Jim decided would have to be accepted. What she desired was a question for herself alone.

She remained at the window for several minutes, during which Adrian's brain was urging his tongue to make the decision.

"So Bill's coming out of quod to-day," observed Adrian in order to break the silence.

"Yes," replied Vicky; "but he'll be in again if he's not careful."

She returned to the table and stood there regarding Adrian closely. "Bill's got no sense," she continued. "He's tough; and he looks what he is—just a sneak-thief." Then, in a passionate, trembling voice, she exposed the thought that was dominant in her mind. "If I only knew where you was goin', Jim, it would n't be so bad."

"Gitting a bit dark," said Adrian. "Could n't we have a light?"

Vicky sighed; it was so like him to refuse to discuss a question once that question was settled in his mind. "Have n't got no more candles," she explained, having fruitlessly searched in the cupboard. "I'll step out and get some presently."

She poked the fire, causing a feeble flicker of flame to illuminate the room.

"That 's better," she observed, returning to her chair.

"Did you post that letter I gave you, day before yesterday?" inquired Adrian suddenly.

Vicky nodded. "I nearly opened it—to see what you 'd said," she admitted with shame-faced candor.

He glanced at her with a frown.

"All right, Jim! I did n't," she added. Then, leaning across the table, "Whatcher want to write letters for to the postmaster at some place in Suffolk?" she inquired.

"I told you not to ask questions," replied Adrian. "What 's come over you lately?"

"I dunno, Jim," said Vicky despondently. "I dunno."

"Well," continued Adrian grimly, "remember what I said. Don't you go back to your old trade."

"I could n't," replied Vicky with a shiver. "I have n't got the nerve. If you 're scared of bein' copped, you 'll *be* copped; and that 'd mean not seein' you for p'r'aps six months."

Adrian looked at her interrogatively. "Ever thought of getting a proper job?" he inquired.

Vicky laughed. "D' you mean—honest?" she asked.

Adrian nodded.

"I could n't get a character," she said.

"I'll get you one," replied Adrian; "a written one."

Vicky gasped. "Jim," she cried: "*that's* not your game? Is it? Not forgin'?"

He shook his head.

"That's all right," said Vicky, relieved. "I thought for a moment——"

"Should n't think, Vicky," replied Adrian grimly.

Vicky gave a shrug. "You're in a different class from us," she asserted; for the underworld has its class distinctiveness and its differences in rank. The master crook is looked upon with awe by the petty thief just as the millionaire financier is revered by the thirty-five-shilling clerk; and the millionaire financier's ultimate fate, if the luck goes against him, is deplored by a humble outside broker in much the same terms as that of the unfortunate despoiler of safe-deposit vaults is commented on by the ordinary pickpocket. Some of us dislike to see Hobbs bowled for a duck, the Derby favorite beaten at the post, the Government defeated; to the ordinary man, Hobbs, the Derby favorite's owner, and the prime minister are celebrities of much worth. In the City the financier who succeeds is equally praiseworthy; and in the underworld the crook who operates successfully is a greater man than Kipling or Conrad.

Vicky recalled their first meeting, standing up in

the tram-car, packed like sardines, Vicky's dive into a lady's hand-bag, Adrian's warning, their subsequent conversation. "I wonder why you spoke to me," she murmured dreamily.

"Did n't want to see you pinched," explained Adrian. "You looked so young."

"Did I please you, Jim?" she inquired eagerly. He nodded. "Did you think I was pretty?"

"Yes," said Adrian. "You reminded me of a picture I once saw in—" he hesitated—"in an officer's dugout, over in France," he continued. He had been going to mention the Paris Salon but had pulled himself up in time.

"I've always tried to keep myself to myself," explained Vicky dreamily; "and to—to speak more like *you* do, Jim. I dunno why. I suppose it was one of those things a girl prides herself on—like keeping her room clean, an' washin' all over every day. Bill could n't understand it."

"Bill's a fool," said Adrian.

Vicky smiled at the thought of the straits to which she had been reduced in the matter of washing and bathing since Adrian's advent. At first he had been too ill to notice anything she did; afterward, she had waited until he was asleep, and had then performed her toilet on the further side of the table. Cleanliness was to her a necessity; even her nails were rarely edged with black. She took a great pride in her appearance. Every-

thing about her was clean. Adrian, being a man, accepted such things as a matter of course.

"Rum you should come along just as that brute Cassidy was goin' to hit me," she said, "for tellin' orf that bit o' hair-dye that 's living with him. I 'm glad it was *me* that picked you up and looked after you. It almost seems like as if it was meant. . . . Does n't it, Jim?"

Adrian, remembering the circumstances that led to his appearance at Parker's Court on that particular night, made no reply. But for Cassidy's interference, the whole course of his life might have been altered. It had indeed been almost like an interposition of Providence.

CHAPTER V

THERE was a single rap at the door, which after a moment, opened slowly, admitting Bill, a weak, anemic copy of Vicky, with the manner and appearance of an incompetent sneak-thief, possessing all the characteristics of a bully without the physical attributes or the moral courage to dominate his surroundings. A young man doomed to failure, destined from the cradle to make mistakes, incompetent in every sense of the word, he exuded an atmosphere of futility; he cringed, he boasted, was given to facetiousness, flinched at a sudden movement, and had weak, watery eyes. His mouth was flabby, immature, given to nervous twitchings. He blinked his eyes constantly, a habit that had become unconscious; whether it was acquired—in imitation of cheap (not in salary) music-hall comedians, or whether it was the result of his inability to look another person straight in the face, is a point not easy to elucidate. He slouched when walking and rarely if ever washed behind his ears. If he had ever possessed a handkerchief, he had either lost it, lent it, or it had gradually faded away from neglect. He was inclined to bluster but was easily cowed.

At the moment, having just come out of prison, he was moderately clean in consequence. His movements were silent, cat-like. His hair was red; not auburn, not chestnut, nor any other modification of that despised tint; it was plain red.

Sheepishly, he greeted his sister.

"'Ullo, Vicky," he said. Then he stared at Adrian suspiciously.

"Hullo, Bill," replied Vicky without enthusiasm. "What d' you want?"

Bill appeared to be pained; he reminded Adrian curiously of Poy's caricatures of the late Mr. Bonar Law. "Ain'tcher glad to see me?" he asked.

"I dunno," said Vicky.

She glanced at Adrian—measuring the effect of Bill's arrival, pondering on the consequences of this impact of personalities. Then she looked once more at Bill. "Have n't got pinched again—yet?" she inquired.

"No," replied Bill, who disliked facetiousness in others and resented personalities. "Whatcher take me for?"

Vicky gave a characteristic shrug. "What you are—a dud," she said.

"Oh, yuss! I *don't* think!" protested Bill.

He stuck his hands in his pockets—curiously enough, they were well-shaped hands, with long fingers, well proportioned, but the thumbs were too retreating, and the nails square and well bitten;

his lower lip protuded; his eyes narrowed; and he sniffed aggressively as he gave Adrian the benefit of a long and unfriendly stare. Bill was naturally distrustful of the unknown, suspicious; he had the will but not the courage to heave half a brick at a stranger.

"So this is the bloke I've bin 'earin' abart," he remarked. Then he vouchsafed a nod, a cautious nod, a nod that promised nothing, about as compromising as a politician's "perhaps." "Evenin', myte," he added.

"Cheer-o," said Adrian without moving.

Adrian was alert, observant, resentful of this intrusion, anxious to get away; but, for Vicky's sake, he had to be moderately polite. He was obliged to perform that most difficult of all tasks to one accustomed to freedom of action—to wait on events.

"Seems ter mike yerself pretty much at 'ome 'ere, don'tcher?" suggested Bill.

"That 'll do, Bill," said Vicky.

Adrian lit another cigarette, which he smoked with extraordinary detachment. He had learned, in the character of Jim Higgins, that strength lay occasionally in apparent inertness.

"I bin 'earin' orl abart '*im*," continued Bill addressing himself to Vicky but talking to Adrian—the favorite refuge of the born coward. "Nice sorter news ter git the dye yer comes arter quod,"

he complained, "that yer sister's bin sharin' 'er 'orspitality wiv a cove no one knows and no one wants ter."

"Jim's been sick," explained Vicky. "I nursed him. That's all."

"Ow," sneered Bill incredulously. "That's orl, is it?"

He thrust his head forward, his lower lip protruding unpleasantly.

"P'raps nar 'e's goin' ter orsk yer to share 'is 'orspitality?" he added nastily.

Vicky shook her head. "He has n't asked me to," she replied.

"Ow, ain't 'e?" said Bill. It was his favorite form of repartee.

"I dunno where 'e lives," continued Vicky, not as a reproach, but in defense of Adrian.

"Ow, don'tcher?" sneered her brother.

Vicky frowned. "Jim hurt himself, savin' me from that brute Cassidy," she explained. "That's why I've been lookin' after him."

"Ow, that's it, is it?" said Bill aggressively. "An' 'oo's money 'ave yer bin spendin'?"

"His," replied Vicky laconically.

"Ow," said Bill, a little relieved, but full of curiosity. "And wot the 'ell does 'e work at when 'e ain't bein' looked after by *you*?"

Adrian flicked some ash from his cigarette and

looked keenly at the intruder. "That 'll do, mate," he suggested. "Turn it off."

Bill ignored the interruption. "'Ave n't yer awsked 'im?" he inquired, fixing Vicky with his gaze.

Vicky shook her head.

"'Strewth," exclaimed Bill. "Yer ain't got much curiosity fer a gal."

"Jim don't sneak milk-cans from outside doors," said Vicky suggestively.

"Ow, chuck it!" protested Bill, flicked on the raw.

"Did Bill get copped for sneaking milk-cans?" inquired Adrian.

"They make such a noise; it woke the cop on duty, and Bill got pinched," explained Vicky.

Bill frowned ominously. He was self-complacent, even self-satisfied, and possessed a considerable portion of that questionable attribute, self-righteousness, a quality belonging peculiarly to the lower middle classes. He disliked being laughed at, made fun of; he had no sense of humor. He took himself seriously; in his mind's eye, he saw himself as a kind of pirate king or brigand chief, desperate, terrifying, with occasional moments of weakness, occasional impulses toward chivalry. He was reminiscent of the boy who sees himself captaining his school eleven, achieving county rank, saving

the honor of England at Lord's by his own amazing coolness and nerve; or, with fewer social advantages, the last to leave the sinking Thames steamer, sacrificing his life for the women and children, and receiving honorable mention in the newspapers for his wonderful heroism. In short, he had not yet acquired a sense of proportion.

"I've cut it out for keeps," protested Bill, who, like so many of his friends, had added to his vocabulary by constant attendance at those modern educational institutions, the picture palaces, from which he had learned something of the great world and of human nature, of history, and a few pregnant facts regarding how the rich live—according to the observations of the film-producing magnates. "Lydies' 'and-bags is goin' ter be my line nar."

Vicky sniffed. "You'll get copped," she asserted, "whatever you do."

"Like as 'ow 'Erb 'Arris wos," suggested Bill meaningly.

"Oh, shut your head about Herb Harris," cried Vicky.

Adrian looked up curiously. "Who's Harris?" he inquired.

Bill stared. "Wot?" he exclaimed incredulously. "Yer ain't never 'eard o' 'Erb 'Arris? Where wos yer born?"

Mr. Herbert Harris was something of a celebrity in the district, and Bill was proud to number a

man so well known to the police among his friends.

"Herb Harris got seven years for half killing a cop," explained Vicky.

"Yuss," volunteered Bill. "Got caught in the act, brikin' inter a benk. It must 'a bin jest abart the time you an' Vicky started bein' friendly-like—so I 'ear. 'E 'd made up 'is mind ter come an' 'ave a few words with yer. . . . An' then 'e got copped. When 'Erb comes arter quod, 'e 's goin' ter do yer in. 'E swore 'e would. 'E 's 'eard abart yer goin's on. A cove wot got sent ter Portland lorst week told 'im orl abart it. Another cove as come art yesterday told me—darn at the King's 'Ead. 'Erb ain't a neasy man ter git shet of."

"Herb Harris is fixed for another six years," said Vicky.

"P'r'aps 'e is," replied Bill. "Whatcher pick up wiv this cove for?" he inquired, with a movement of his head in the direction of Adrian.

"Because I did! That 's why," muttered Vicky defiantly.

Bill became unpleasantly facetious. "Wiv 'Erb in quod, an' me doin' me bit, I s'pose yer got lonely?"

"Have n't you asked enough questions, mate?" inquired Adrian.

"I 'm 'er brother," asserted Bill, "an' I 've got a right ter see as 'ow she be'ives 'erself."

"I 'm behavin' myself all right," said Vicky with

a suggestion of bitterness. "I ain't done nothing to shock grandma."

Bill looked at her suspiciously. "Ain't 'e awsked yer to?"

"No," replied Vicky with an enigmatic smile. "Jim ain't that sort."

Adrian's reticence regarding his own desires, though perhaps a little humiliating to her vanity, undoubtedly paid tribute to her pride. He was treating her with respect, a quality conspicuous by its absence in the circles Vicky haunted. Though the woman in her cried out for response, her virginity uttered prayers of thankfulness for Adrian's almost miraculous chivalry. She would have given herself to him, gladly, selflessly, had he asked her; and yet, though the sacrifice would have been made without regret, without counting the cost, she was glad, in a way, that he had n't demanded this gift. Rather than lose him, she would offer it. She had no morals, only instinctive decency. She could have given no reasons, even to herself, for anything she did. She had learned, almost from the cradle, that life was one long game of grab and snatch, a colossal dog-fight for a few prize bones which the winners held tightly against all comers, and that the majority had to be content with pictures of the bones in the illustrated papers. Many idealistic social experiments had proved that man was an individualist, unalterable, egotistic, a caveman; only exceptional

cases proved the contrary. And what was the fate of the altruist, the unselfish idealist, the selfless philanthropist? In the parlance of her friends, he got left. The flickering spark of selflessness persisted, too tiny to achieve notoriety, its soft but haunting melody drowned in the brazen chorus of individualism; but it was there for those who could read the score—the still small voice in the eternal burden of brass, more certain proof that God lived than could be obtained from the sight of ten thousand churches, cathedrals, chapels. To Vicky, life was a hard material struggle, without leisure for abstract speculation—a philosophy incomprehensible to the average British mind. Abstract speculation, idealism, visionary theories, what had such things done for that huge, sprawling, cold, unfriendly country that thought itself European while it remained semi-barbarous, Oriental, prehistoric? Had Vicky been born on the banks of the Volga or in the shadow of the almost vulgar picturesqueness of Moscow, she would insensibly have become a patriot, a dreamer, a martyr; but in the utilitarian hideousness of the East End of London she had merely become what her family had always been.

“'As 'e got any money?” inquired Bill suspiciously.

“I dunno,” replied Vicky.

Bill was unable to understand or to sympathize with Vicky's instinctive lack of curiosity, her natural

reticence. He grew more and more exasperated. "Don'tcher ever feel yer 'd like ter know wot 'e does when 'e ain't 'ere?"

Vicky shrugged her shoulders. "P'r'aps I do," she said.

Bill scratched his head and indulged in a long scrutiny of Adrian's personality. "Wonder wot yer line is," he muttered contemplatively.

Adrian laughed grimly. "Give you three guesses," he suggested.

Bill frowned. "Should n't wonder if it was n't kerntry 'ouses," he replied. "I would n't like that job," he added with a shiver. "They 'as dawgs—dawgs wot bite."

"Well," observed Vicky contemptuously. "*You* ain't likely to fly so high as *that*."

Bill shook his head. "Sneakin' collectin'-boxes from kids is a better gyme," he remarked. "I tried carol-singin' at Crissmass, but folks ain't so tender-hearted as they wos."

"Huh," cried Vicky. "Your singing 'd make a dawg sick."

Bill looked at Adrian challengingly. "Why don'tcher marry 'er?" he inquired.

Vicky frowned. "'T ain't none o' *your* business," she protested.

"P'r'aps yer don't want ter," suggested Bill.

"P'r'aps he don't," said Vicky. "It's *his* busi-

ness, anyhow," she added, flushing with annoyance. "Shut your head about marrying."

"Ain't I your brother?" inquired Bill, trying to appear conscientiously apprehensive of such responsibility.

"A hell of a brother, I *don't* think," murmured Vicky, apparently addressing the carpet.

Bill became reminiscent and a trifle sentimental. The tankards of beer with which he had celebrated his return to freedom were beginning to function. Beer is apt to make a young man maudlin, where champagne would induce recklessness and whisky would stimulate crime. Perhaps our British partiality for sopiness is largely due to our national stimulant, just as the French cold-blooded logic and clear-sightedness is the result of the health-giving light wine, and the Scottish take-it-or-leave-it attitude can be traced to its whisky. Do not the potent spirits of the East stimulate dreams and, with unsteady legs and clear brain, lead to subtlety of thought and hatred of hurry? Does not Mr. Pussy-foot bring gross materialism in his train, the tea-drinking of Australia lead to dyspepsia and aggressiveness, the coffee-swilling of Scandinavia induce slow thinking and pessimism, the result of poisoned kidneys and injured liver? Can it be denied that the diet of a country is largely responsible for that nation's policy? If the English drank light wine

and renounced beer, they would be irresistible; if the French took to British beer, they would cease to lead civilization; if the Scotch went dry, they would become religious fanatics; if the boche drank nothing but China tea, he would become a candidate for the Geneva experiment. Far wiser would it be for reformers to change a nation's drink instead of prohibiting it. They would earn the gratitude of the student of cause and effect.

"We 'ad a good time before *you* blew in," muttered Bill, turning on Adrian a watery-eyed look of reproach, "'er an' me an' 'Erb. 'Erb was a big gun in 'is own line, an' generous wiv the splosh. I did a fair tryde in the toobe lifts, an' Vicky was a wonder at pickin' things up wot did n't belong to 'er. Don'tcher ever do nothink now?" he inquired, turning to his sister, who was apparently absorbed in the once-aggressive pattern of the faded carpet.

"No," replied Vicky. "I can't."

Bill stared. "Why not?" he asked.

"Might get copped," said Vicky.

Bill snorted. "Yer did n't use ter 'ave the wind up," he protested.

"If I got copped, I would n't see Jim—not for a long time," explained Vicky mechanically. "I could n't stand that."

She shivered.

"Ow," exclaimed Bill meditatively. "So that 's 'ow the land lies, is it?"

Adrian suffered a stab of self-reproach. Growing uncomfortable, he vented his irritation on Bill. "Anything more you want to know?" he inquired impatiently.

Bill hedged; moral courage had never been his long suit. "Yer 'ave put it over 'er a treat," he remarked.

"No, he has n't," retorted Vicky with a flash of spirit. "Not in the way *you* mean. Have you, Jim?"

Adrian shook his head. The intimacy of the conversation jarred his fastidiousness.

"And he never tried to," continued Vicky proudly. "Did you, Jim?"

Once more Adrian shook his head. Memory sometimes fails as a consoler, still more so as a stimulus to self-approbation.

"Jim ain't that sort," concluded Vicky with dignity.

Bill voiced the thought that had remained semi-dormant in Vicky's mind. The tactlessness of putting such thoughts into words exasperated her, caused her to draw in her breath suddenly.

"S'pose 'e don't turn up one dye," suggested Bill; "an' the next, an' for a week, or not at all. . . . Whatcher do then?"

"I'd go out and look for him," replied Vicky defiantly, at the same time putting her hand timidly on Adrian's shoulder—a little action of possessive-

ness, intensely feminine, that was almost pathetic.

"An' if yer farnd 'im?" inquired Bill.

Vicky gave a shrug. "I would n't do nothing to *him*," she muttered; "only to the woman as had got him away from me."

"Chuck it, Vicky," said Adrian, using his lower register with some effect.

"'Strewth!" exclaimed Bill morosely. "She's got it bad."

He contemplated Vicky with a kind of deprecating wonder. "Whatcher sees in 'im beats *me*," he continued. "But yer did n't plye fair with 'Erb."

Bill was the type of weak youth that liked to attach itself to something stronger than itself, eager to be dominated, willing to play second fiddle, provided always that he could boast of his association with the celebrity in question. Even in a school the bully has his satellites; and in the universal school that we call the world such associations are not uncommon. The king has his lackeys, the prime minister his runners-up, the company promoter his guinea-pigs; the world-renowned prize-fighter moves about attended by his admirers; the actor-manager has his "advisers"; the expert criminal by no means discourages his gang, eager for the crumbs that may fall from the rich man's table. To nod to Herbert Harris at the public house honored by that gentleman's patronage, to receive an occasional word from those tightly closed lips, was an honor cherished by

Bill. And here was Vicky, turning down a great man in order to take up with an ordinary sort of cove like this beggar Higgins. It was exasperating. "No," repeated Bill gloomily, "yer did n't play fair with 'Erb."

"Yes, I did," replied Vicky. "I told Herb Harris there was nothing doing. He did n't believe it. Too sure of himself, Herb Harris was. It made him savage."

"'E'd myde up 'is mind yer'd give in," explained Bill reproachfully, certain in his own mind that a man had only to persist with sufficient patience eventually to win whatever he wanted from any member of the sex in question. "'E wanted yer somethink crool."

An angry flush appeared on Vicky's usually colorless cheeks. "Will you shut your head about Herb Harris?" she cried. "He's got no call to talk as though I belonged to him. I don't belong to Herb Harris, nor to no one else. If Herb Harris wants anything—or any one—he thinks he's got first call, and every one else has got to keep off the grass."

She shivered, glanced at Adrian; then her gaze once more fastened on the carpet.

Harris was a brooding sort of man; if he threatened to do a thing, he usually carried out his threat. He was a man of one idea, and the idea persisted. A dangerous man, vain, almost childish in his attachment to his desires, brutal, low-browed, with fists

that could hit like sledge-hammers, wrists of steel, the strength of an elephant. An ugly customer to thwart, ruthless, animal in his passions, elemental, crafty, a man to placate—or avoid. He inspired Vicky with horror; but she had no fear of him. He had pursued her, steadily, ruthlessly, grimly, sure of his ultimate victory; he had constituted himself dictator regarding her acquaintances; no other dog was permitted to bark. Gradually it became a fixed idea in Parker's Court that Vicky was Harris's property, sacred on that account. Only Vicky refused to accept the idea. Her rebellion infuriated Harris, though he held himself in and continued to conduct his wooing—if such a term may be used in connection with the methods of Mr. Herbert Harris—with that grim determination characteristic of the man. His capture by the police and his sentence of seven years' penal servitude had come as a relief to Vicky. She breathed more freely now that Harris was safely put away. A lot might happen in seven years; though she knew that neither seven nor seventeen years would alter Harris's mind or weaken his determination. Because of all this, and chiefly because she hated the idea of such a discussion in front of the man she loved, Vicky resented passionately Bill's tactless references to Harris.

"You wyte till 'Erb 'Arris gits outer quod," muttered Bill, gazing at Adrian with morbid, gloating anticipation. "'E won't do nothink to *you*, 'e

won't. Gawdstruth! I would n't be in *your* shoes for somethink."

Vicky looked up wearily. "Did n't I tell you to shut your head about Herb Harris?" she asked.

Bill shook his head, almost in the manner of one deploring a tragedy while enjoying it. He possessed all the instincts so characteristic of his class. A murder would keep his mind occupied for days; even a funeral was a form of enjoyment, provided that it was n't his own. He was one of those people the less fastidious Sunday papers catered for. Verbatim reports of police-court cases thrilled him; the more revolting details there were, the more he felt that he was getting the worth of his money. Street accidents drew him like a magnet; even a fallen horse provided a mild sensation; the sight of blood to him was an even greater joy than a hitherto undiscovered Velásquez would have been to an art critic. He had not reached that refined state of mentality where the dying agonies of a beaten fox satisfied his blood-lust, nor had he reached that altruistic state of good fellowship and generosity that stimulated his more civilized prototype to dab a still warm portion of the unfortunate animal's anatomy, blood-soaked and quivering, on the cheeks of growing girls, thus admitting them as full members of the glorious cult of killing. Had he been more fortunate in his ancestry, he would doubtless have acquired this and other manners and customs; he

would have encouraged his women-folk to decorate their head-gear with paradise plumes and ospreys; had he been born a Spaniard, he would have acted as their cicerone to the refined and fashionable amusement of the bull-ring. As it was, he was obliged to content himself with the sights the streets provided, and with second-hand accounts of murders and other choice sensations in the cheaper press. It was too bad that nearly a century had elapsed since the palmy days of public executions. Such free entertainments had apparently gone for ever. Eighteenth-century wits like George Selwyn and Lord March, men whose company was greatly sought after, had made attendance at hangings and beheadings a fashionable amusement. Bill was born too late. . . .

"Well," he exclaimed, "if 'Erb *does* brike arter quod, you tyke me tip, myte, an' git awye before 'Erb starts 'andlin' yer. There ain't many as could stand up to 'Erb. You wyte till 'e ketches yer. You wyte. . . ."

He moved over towards the door. "Well," he added facetiously, "I won't accept yer pressin' invitytion ter styte. I've got a dyte darn at the King's 'Ead. . . . So-long, myte. . . . So-long, Vicky!"

He opened the door just as the Rev. Eustace Hillingdon was about to knock. The sight of the

black-coated figure was too much for Bill. "Gawds-truth!" he exclaimed. "A bleedin' parson! I'm orf!"

He clattered down the rickety stairs and dived into the fog-ridden gloomy court.

CHAPTER VI

JUSTACE entered the room, swallowing the panic that invariably assailed him at his first introduction to strange people, especially those to whose abodes he came without invitation. He disliked intruding, disliked it intensely, but was compelled by the exigencies of his chosen calling to intrude constantly, often unwelcomed. He was a shy man, but experience had taught him to conceal that disability. He was one of those men, lacking in ordinary egotism, who are constitutionally unable to credit the fact that their presence is welcome, their company sought. When preaching a sermon, he was always aware of the fact that he was doing it badly; not that he was n't justifying himself, but that he was n't satisfying his listeners. He was not self-conscious, merely self-distrustful. He was genuinely humble, sincere always; his optimism carried him round difficult corners, and his skill with his fists gave him a certain *cachet*. Perhaps he was trying to mop up the Atlantic with a sponge; but honest endeavor is rarely futile. In his colder moments, when Reason functioned and Illusion slept, he wondered whether social service of any kind was

of the slightest use; whether to help people who could not or would not help themselves was not helping them to be more helpless; whether the utterly sincere philanthropist, if he were wise, would not start upon his crusade of reform by burning down the whole of that huge, shapeless, heterogeneous eyesore, the East End of London, and putting out of their misery the majority of those that dwelt therein. Would a really Christian country tolerate for a moment such amazingly unequal social conditions? Was God unjust, or merely impotent? Was our fate the result of character, and our character the result of heredity and environment? Could we change our fate if we changed our character, or our character if our fate was changed? Was what happened to us brought on ourselves? Did our success or failure lie in our character? Not from a moral sense, but physiologically? Could will-power, determination—even ruthless determination—give us what we wanted? Was there something to be said for that tenet of fatalism, that our characters mold our destinies? It was all so baffling, so contradictory, so apparently chaotic. We could give our children good blood, clean bodies, and reasonable minds; we could train them in thought, ethics, and habit; but without the where-withal to maintain them in clean surroundings, health-giving, stimulating, of what use were such birthrights? The economic problem so often

doomed them, held them down, stifled them. There was not enough money to go round, not enough food, not enough work. The world was too small for its population. A few privileged beings possessed everything; the great majority had to snatch what they could. He remembered a phrase from a play: "This brotherhood of bandits that we call civilization!" . . . Civilization was a comic description of these horrible slums; it was cruelly ironical. Religion asserted that God made man in his own image. Reason might protest that man made God in his own image and continued to worship that which he had created. Was it man's egotism that had created belief in a future life? Or did we believe that life persisted merely because we possessed a fundamental faith in the square deal? Or did we get another chance to make good our failures in life? A natural hope, a reasonable desire. Was it reasonable to desire the best, to be discontented with failure? Yet, if life were logical, then failures must be scrapped. If the world believed this, how many would go on living? Did the force that creates life create also the belief in a future life in order to stimulate us to live? What *was* the force that drove us to create! A force, apparently, outside ourselves. . . . If God were omnipotent, the world would be perfect. If God could interfere with man's destiny, the world would be heaven. But the laws of life were logical and im-

mutable. Nature was non-moral; she merely persisted, driving blindly, callous of consequences. Life was a race in which the egotist and the entirely selfish received an unfair handicap. Morality, altruism, all the virtues, started at scratch. One went back to causes and realized the logic of it all. Why did some of us believe in the ultimate good of everything when only pessimism was logical? Of what use was prayer if God were omnipotent? If God were capable of righting injustice, why did knavery flourish? The problem was baffling. Why did vulgarity pay supertax, and sincerity, refinement, and truth go in rags? Was it because human nature loved flattery, disliked truth, and despised sincerity? Why did human nature resent truth? Was it because man had created God in his own image, his own imagination, and because the creator is, in his own opinion, greater than the thing created? Then—most baffling problem of all! Who is God? What is God? Where is God? Was God the vital spark in man that urged man to persist, gave man his belief in immortality, stimulated his rare moments of greatness?

At such moments, the old, simple faith of his boyhood days seemed like an unreal dream; he could n't reconcile the ideal with the actual. If the Founder of Christian Ethics could return to earth, if he came to England, to London, would he start his crusade in the slums, or would he find more work to do, a

harder row to hoe, in the more favored districts of the West End, in the trim and self-righteous suburbs, even in cathedral closes and pleasant country rectories?

Fortunately for Eustace, such pessimism rarely persisted for long; he would waken in the morning with fresh courage, renewed vigor, and a faith that was almost pathetic. In the morning he would realize that to carry on to the best of your ability was the ultimate test of a man's sincerity. It was only at night, in the loneliness of his tiny bedroom, when failure seemed to surround him, when he was tired out, weary of the cruelty of man, that pessimism came into its own.

His courage did not falter as he came into the room and closed the door.

The reflection from the fire caught his face; Adrian glanced at him casually, drew in his breath quickly, and hitched the chair on which he was seated a foot or two back out of the firelight.

Eustace glanced at him, then at Vicky. "Excuse me," he said with a somewhat apologetic smile that had nothing clerical about it, "my friend Dr. Munro happened to mention——"

"What d' you want?" inquired Vicky suspiciously.

Eustace turned to her; he was getting his second wind, and his manner became more assured. "Dr. Munro told me that you had been nursing some one who had had an accident," he explained. "I won-

dered whether I could do anything. I'm working at the Old Wykehamist Settlement. . . . Oh, I have n't come to preach," he added quickly, noticing the antagonistic frown on Vicky's forehead. Though the light was dim, Eustace was quick to receive impressions. "I came to find out if your patient wanted any letters written, or if he would like to borrow a book, or—or if I could make myself useful in any way?"

Vicky shook her head. "You did n't ought to come down here alone—in them togs," she said. "'T aint' safe!"

"It's my job," replied Eustace. "One does n't have cold feet in an East End settlement."

Vicky looked dubiously at Adrian. "What about it?" she inquired.

Adrian muttered some words to the effect that the parson had better make himself useful somewhere else. "Don't do me out of my job," pleaded Eustace, intrigued by a certain quality in the speaker's voice.

"Jim's sick," explained Vicky; "and he ain't fond of company."

"I know," said Eustace sympathetically. "That's how *I* felt when I broke my leg. I had a bit of an argument with a friend of mine over the way. He had had a few drinks. He got in with his left on my chin. I went down! It kept me on my back for a couple of months. One gets

awfully fed up with being on one's back, does n't one?"

"You did n't ought to muck about down here," murmured Vicky.

"But I love it," replied Eustace with enthusiasm. "I have any number of friends. The chap who knocked me down used to bring me oranges . . . and wheelks. I taught him to play chess. Would you care for a game?" he inquired, peering at Adrian through the gloom.

"Don't play chess," muttered Adrian ungraciously.

"D' you want him to go?" whispered Vicky, standing between Adrian and their visitor.

Adrian cleared his throat. "He can stay if he wants to," he said.

"Don't let him worry you," urged Vicky. "I'll step out and get them candles."

She turned her tragic eyes on Eustace. "Don't let him talk too much, mister," she pleaded. "'E ain't strong yet."

"I'll be careful," replied Eustace. "I promise."

"Right-o," said Vicky, pinning on her hat. "Sorry the light ain't better. I sha'n't be long."

She left the two men together and descended the stairs. Eustace closed the door and returned to the table. "Dr. Munro tells me you had a bad accident and that this girl has nursed you through it. May I sit down?"

He took Adrian's consent for granted and sat down by the table, his back to the door, facing Adrian, who was between the table and the fireplace. "I see you're smoking. Do you mind if I join you?"

He pulled out his pipe and proceeded to fill it; it was a noble pipe, ancient, battered, well colored, huge, a relic of his Oxford days, an old and faithful friend that had seen service in France. "I have n't been in this settlement very long," he continued. "I find it most interesting."

He waited a moment for Adrian's reply; receiving none, he continued his monologue. "I was a padre in France during the war," he explained. "I made a lot of friends who came from this part of London. Splendid fellows—most of them! A bit shy with me at first, but we soon got over that."

He lit his pipe, then turned to Adrian, the match still alight in his hand. There was a long silence, then a gasp from Eustace, and the match fell from his hand on to the table. "Good Lord!" he cried. "Adrian!"

He struck another match and applied the flame to his pipe, his eyes fixed on Adrian, who was smiling grimly.

"May I have your match?" asked Adrian.

He lit another fag; Eustace stared at him, bewildered.

"Adrian St. Clair!" he gasped. Then, more conversationally, "I have n't seen you since we were up at the house."

Adrian chuckled. "It's a fair cop, Eustace," he admitted.

"What on earth are you doing here?" inquired Eustace, still overcome by the strangeness of the situation. "You, the leader of the bloods, the Epicurean philosopher, the fastidious Adrian St. Clair?"

Adrian reflected for a moment, then gave a philosophical shrug. His manner altered; he insensibly drifted into the clipped speech of his own caste. Jim Higgins, the mysterious, gruff-voiced, tough denizen of the underworld, suffered a sea-change, and Adrian St. Clair, the courteous, well-bred host of Hill Street, Mayfair, took his place. It was a metamorphosis a little staggering to Eustace.

Adrian's reflections had led him to the realization of the fact that only the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth must be told. He knew that he could trust Eustace, who was the kind of man that never betrayed a confidence. And he wanted to talk, to tell his story, to discover the normal, conventional man's point of view. He realized that, by putting his story into words, he himself would take a critical attitude toward it. He had lived so entirely within himself during these last few months that he had lost perspective. A man

can so easily lose perspective, get out of touch with things, mistake illusion for reality, reality for illusion. Exile—whether actual or mental—distorted the logical faculty that is commonly supposed to be a masculine inheritance. A man who dreams too much, who lives entirely in his own thoughts, without the tonic of criticism, divorced from the world's attitude, is likely to become a little crazy, distinctly abnormal, what the Americans call "different." Eustace would put him wise on many points.

"It's a rum world, Eustace," he exclaimed.

Eustace frowned. "You—in these surroundings—make it even more mysterious."

"Man is the unknown quantity in our calculations," said Adrian. "He is an eternal enigma—even to himself."

Eustace smiled reminiscently. "You used to say that whom the gods would destroy they first make fastidious. Are you a living proof of your own theory?"

"More or less," replied Adrian. "I got into a scrap with a man who was trying to hit a girl. I fell down-stairs. She took me in, and nursed me back to consciousness."

"So I understand," said Eustace. "Quite! . . . But what were you doing *up* the stairs?"

Adrian hesitated. "Studying the beasts in the jungle," he explained, after a slight pause.

Eustace noticed both the hesitation and the pause. He was used to these mental reservations. "You've taken to sociology?" he asked.

"Quite," admitted Adrian.

"You don't live here?" inquired Eustace.

Adrian shook his head.

"Does your own world know where you are?"

Adrian laughed; there was a certain grimness in his laugh that spoke volumes to the trained mind of Eustace. Then he explained that he was supposed to be at Aldeburgh, playing golf.

It was the other's turn to hesitate. "That girl," he exclaimed. "She does n't know . . . who you are? Adrian! You—you have n't——"

"No," replied Adrian, wondering whether, in Eustace's position, he himself would credit the denial.

Exasperated, he turned to his interlocutor, almost savagely.

"Eustace," he cried, "you've found out something by accident, something I hoped would always remain a secret."

"I'm a priest," replied Eustace simply. "I respect a confidence."

Adrian nodded. He knew that Eustace meant what he said. Eustace had always been a curiously understanding sort of chap.

"If I told you my story," said Adrian gloomily,

"you'd be tempted to report it to a specialist in mental diseases."

"I learned discretion in France," protested Eustace with a smile.

Adrian stared at the discouraged-looking fire. "Can you understand the sudden desire of the civilized man to hit a policeman?" he asked.

Eustace nodded. He had heard young subalterns swank about kicking senior officers when they got back into mufti, though that was scarcely a parallel case.

"Human instinct works in waves," explained Adrian, unconsciously quoting the conversation he had overheard at his club. Then he pulled up short; he hated repeating other men's theories as his own. "A man is as a rule more than he suspects and less than he imagines. The more a man studies himself, the less proud he becomes of the result."

Eustace smiled. The war had taught him to know something of his fellow-men; it had stimulated his sympathy, tempered criticism with sympathy.

"Would you condemn a man, driven by unsuspected desires, for surrendering to them?" inquired Adrian eagerly.

"I told you I was n't here to preach," replied Eustace.

Adrian turned and faced his visitor. He was en-

deavoring to get into his stride, but found the process rather difficult.

"Man is a complex animal," he remarked.

Eustace, realizing that Adrian desired to get something off his chest, took up his cue. "Complex? Yes," he agreed. "An animal? Sometimes. . . . But always interesting."

He looked up at Adrian interrogatively. "You were in France during the war?"

Adrian nodded.

"As an officer?"

Adrian nodded again.

"Have you lost your money?"

Adrian shook his head.

"Then, in the name of common sense, my dear Adrian," cried Eustace, growing more and more bewildered, "what are you doing in this galley?"

"Following a will-o'-the-wisp," replied Adrian.

Eustace frowned. "A woman?" he asked.

"No," said Adrian.

He smoked contemplatively for a moment. "I hate all this," he explained; "but—it fascinates me."

He stared into the distance. "The war," he muttered; "that damned war!"

"Hell with the lid off, we used to call it," said Eustace.

"An ancestor of mine—a blood, and a celebrated wit in the eighteenth century—used to take a mor-

bid delight in witnessing executions," continued Adrian. "He was a pal of George Selwyn's and all that rum crowd. They used to go together, or else one went, and wrote the other long and stilted letters, giving the ghastly details—gloating over them. Queer taste, was n't it? Another one—a century earlier—picked a girl out of the gutter and married her. Perhaps I'm a throw-back to environment or a victim of heredity. . . I dunno. . . . What are we, Eustace? Just echoes of our forefathers, with modern improvements, or living links in the chain, items in the soul-progressions through which we ultimately attain freedom? . . . How can I explain the impulse that drove me to sample this lurid phase of life? I *can't* explain it. . . . I only know that I was driven—driven—driven. It was n't a whim; it was something bigger than myself, and now I long to get out of it . . . and can't. . . . Have you ever studied Freud?" he inquired, suddenly breaking into his own train of thought.

Eustace shook his head. "I get little time for reading," he explained; "and my friends, when I read to them, prefer something a little more exciting."

"According to Freud, I might be a man whose subconscious gets a little above par now and then," explained Adrian.

"The normal surrendering to the abnormal?" inquired Eustace.

"Or vice versa," replied Adrian grimly. "It depends on your point of view."

Eustace frowned. "Owing to the war?" he suggested.

"The war altered my outlook on life," said Adrian. "One became elemental. The veneer wore off. One returned to civil life, wanting something that was n't there. One started to look for it elsewhere."

"Our beloved Blighty did n't live up to its reputation," murmured Eustace reminiscently.

"I wanted response, sincerity, life without pretense," muttered Adrian, now eager to explain to himself as well as to Eustace all those curious motives that had sent him, a pilgrim, into a new and fascinating world. "I did n't want amusement. I was n't interested in politics, Bolshevism, revolution, profiteering, Ireland, reparations, debts—all those staggering concomitants to the aftermath of a world war. I merely wanted what I'd craved for during those four and a half years."

"You're married?" inquired Eustace. Adrian admitted the fact. "Any family?" Adrian replied in the negative. "So you're writing a book?"

Adrian gave a shrug. "I was going to," he admitted. "I have n't written a word."

"Is it," inquired Eustace quietly, "a woman?"

"No," said Adrian. "No! It's the hideous fascination of the underworld that has got me by

the throat, dragging me down, away from everything I love—and need—and belong to.”

Eustace discarded the ashes from his pipe. “You ’re not the sort of man I should have suspected of leading a double life,” he said. Adrian looked up, frowning. “You had such an ingrained dislike of bad form.”

“I have it still,” replied Adrian.

CHAPTER VII

A MAN who is universally popular rarely goes below the surface conversationally; and, if he is an Englishman, still less is he accustomed to discuss anything but superficialities. He has an ingrained horror of giving himself away. The reserve of a boy, that almost sacred quality, becomes, in course of time, the detachment of a man. The more easily he talks, the less easy it is to read what is in his mind. He prides himself on his reticence. It is bad form to be personal. Self-analysis leads to self-consciousness. Hence the impersonal attitude of the average well-bred man of the world.

But once the plug is taken from the bath, the water rushes out. Adrian had said enough to make it necessary to say more. His desire to unburden himself was irresistible. He told his story to Eustace, shocking his own fastidiousness in the process. Intimate details—matters no man could speak of without a kind of shame—poured out unchecked. It seemed to Adrian that while he was talking he was at the same time listening to some stranger who was confiding his most private problems, blatantly, unashamed, to the world at large.

He told Eustace everything; that he was married to a very beautiful woman, a woman he respected, a woman he loved. They had had the same ideas and ideals: to live their own lives as it pleased them, to be true to the traditions of their upbringing. They had been a little old-fashioned perhaps in their dislike of publicity—before the war. They had lived a detached life, mixing only with their own kind, sure of their friends, loyal to the unwritten laws that governed their conduct; they had hunted, shot, fished, at the right seasons; they had played tennis at Cannes, golf at Biarritz, when their friends were doing the same. Their lives had been regulated by tradition, habit, custom. They questioned nothing. They deplored modern tendencies, the muttered grumblings of democracy, the decay of manners, the vulgarity of politics; but never with heat. They rarely became excited. They worshiped moderation in everything, preferred too much cold to too much heat—a sure sign of absence of fanaticism. In fact, their lives ran on well-oiled wheels. “But mark how the ironic humor of the gods disturbed our equanimity, the perfect harmony of our existence!” cried Adrian, staring into the fire. He paused for a moment in his recital, then shook himself like a dog wet from a pond. “I don’t understand myself, Eustace,” he muttered.

Eustace smoked thoughtfully. “Does your wife understand *you*?” he asked.

Adrian shook his head. Drusilla knew nothing of this other man who was trying to take the place, he explained, of the once fastidious Adrian St. Clair. Before the war, he had had no symptoms of revolt from his surroundings. He had come back after the armistice, irritable, disliking routine, to be satiated with comfort, exasperated by the thought that he had only to push a bell to get virtually anything he wanted. And underneath it all had grown an overpowering desire to run amuck.

"The soul-destroying tragedy of fulfilled desire," commented Eustace.

"No," contradicted Adrian; "desire unfulfilled, desire thwarted." It had made him long to go out and throw stones at the windows of Berkeley Square, to go on strike against a surfeit of respectability, to pull down the pillars of the temple where the unimaginative worshiped good form. In fact, he had found himself a rebel, loathing all the unwritten laws of social convenience that he had once obeyed without question, that he had formerly acknowledged to be immutable.

"Did n't your wife object?" inquired Eustace.

Adrian laughed grimly. His wife was fastidious, too; as fastidious as he himself had once been. She put a barrier round herself, a kind of intangible *chevaux-de-frise*. He had barged back into her life after the war, so changed from the man she had married, that he had frightened her. He himself

had been up against realities; she had purposely ignored them. She had been virtually a grass-widow all those years, and perhaps he had been a bit too possessive in his attitude. She had shrunk from him, insensibly, without meaning to, kept him at a distance, unconsciously appealed to his chivalry, locked the door on her own responsiveness, and the realization of her attitude had been grueling to Adrian. He had been sufficiently self-controlled to respect her unspoken wishes. He had been what the world would have called chivalrous. But he had chafed, rebelled, had had moments of exasperation, had acquiesced under protest. "Could I have told you of these things ten years ago? Good Lord! the bad form would have shocked me!" he cried.

Eustace nodded understandingly. It was not the first confession of the kind he had listened to since the end of the war. He sympathized with men, knew little of women; and, to him, sex was a mystery—baffling, frightening, an enemy to be fought daily, blindfold, with prayer on the lips, courage in the heart. A constitutional celibate himself, he could yet understand incontinence in others. Man was an enigma, but the war had proved his greatness.

The average man of Adrian's class exhausted his primeval instincts by killing pheasants, chasing foxes, shooting lions; by that strange blood-lust that is politely termed "sport"—a terminological ec-

centricity that had become generally accepted. But Adrian had done enough killing in the war. Instead of the desire to kill, the irresistible impulse to take on a new personality had overwhelmed him; the desire to live the life of the submerged; to love, hate, fear, fight; to throw off the mantle of civilization, and to be his own raw, unpolished self. "I pictured myself coming back to Hill Street, temporarily restored to sanity, ready to wallow in luxury, prepared to be . . . chivalrous . . . to my wife, thankful for her fastidious dread of emotion," he explained.

Eustace smiled. "I have heard men say that the pleasure of yielding to a desire is greater than the satisfaction of resisting it."

"It was n't a question of pleasure," protested Adrian fiercely. "I tell you I was driven—driven . . . and I yielded."

"You explored the depths and found them stimulating?" suggested Eustace.

Adrian continued his explanation. He had made excuses for his absences; golf, for instance. He had changed his clothes, and his personality, at Liverpool Street Station, checked his suit-case, and vanished into the underworld. He had learned to be himself, without pretense; to speak what came into his mind without fear of offense. And yet, despite all this, he wanted Eustace to understand that he loved Drusilla, loved her passionately. . . .

Too passionately—for his peace of mind . . . or hers.

"And now you know," he concluded, after a long pause, "why I'm here."

Eustace was not quite sure that he knew everything. There was, for example, the girl whose room they were occupying at the moment.

"Your own world would cut you," said Eustace, "if *they* knew."

"The element of risk was half the fascination," replied Adrian, "at first. I thought I was sufficiently impersonal to keep myself detached. But I've gone deeper than I intended to."

"Quite," agreed Eustace, pressing down the tobacco in his pipe. "That girl?"

"I'm not in love with her," protested Adrian. "I'm in love with my wife."

Eustace nodded. He believed Adrian's explanation; but, as Adrian had said, man was a complex animal.

"I'm not a prig, or a saint," continued Adrian. "Perhaps I'm still fastidious," he added, a little grimly; "or perhaps—perhaps my wife stands sentinel, guarding the sanctuary of my inner life."

A fall of soot subdued what remained of the fire. Adrian was thankful that the darkness of the room concealed his face. He was thinking of Drusilla, longing for her; he felt the necessity for a Turkish bath—figuratively as well as literally; he wanted to

go to her, cured of his madness, to woo her once more, to wipe out the memory of the last few months. His love for Drusilla hurt him; he hated these long absences. He missed her. He was even unjustly resentful of Vicky's devotion to himself—for Drusilla's sake. If only he could be strong enough to ride himself on the curb, strong enough to conquer these disastrous impulses!

All the same, it would be caddish to show ingratitude to Vicky for all that she had done for him. Why was it, when he was normal, master of himself, more like his own self, that he could think of Vicky impersonally, talk of her coolly, as though she were an abstract idea? And that, when the obsession returned—when he was apparently under some unknown control, a slave to impulse, irresponsible, he felt drawn to her by some irresistible impulse, desired her—realizing all the time that, if he yielded, such weakness would make him the bearer of never-ceasing regrets, that it would prove an impregnable barrier between Drusilla and himself in this world, and perhaps in the next? No; he must fight, fight, fight; win back his sanity; conquer his weakness.

"I'm in a devil of a hole, Eustace," he explained. "This girl, Vicky, took me in and nursed me when I was half dead, delirious, racked with pain. She has devoted herself to me, given up her means of livelihood to please me. She was a thief—one of

a family of thieves. And yet—given a chance—she would have been——” He paused for a moment. “There you are! Environment again!” he added.

He looked at Eustace and spoke again in a low tone, between his teeth. “I wonder if you know how damnably tempted a man is sometimes to take the goods the gods set before him, careless of the consequences—to others. . . . I’ve resisted, held myself in. . . . But the more you surrender to any form of desire, the weaker your will grows. . . . I can feel myself drifting—away from everything that in my heart I want most.”

Eustace smiled—a little ruefully. “If you can’t conquer your enemy,” he said, “run away from him.”

A change came over Adrian’s face; the enemy was attempting a reconnaissance in force. “This girl would give me all that my wife shrinks from giving,” he muttered.

“I see,” replied Eustace coldly, knocking out the ashes from his pipe. “It’s a question of self-indulgence.”

“No, it is n’t, damn you!” protested Adrian fiercely.

He pulled himself together. “I beg your pardon, Eustace,” he muttered. “One gets into the habit of free speech down here. There are no reserves; there’s no reticence. One does n’t have to be . . . chivalrous.”

The shadow passed from his face; his manner became more normal; his accents insensibly grew more polished. "How can I end it all," he cried, "without some explanation? What can I explain? I can't tell Vicky that I'm married. Besides, that would n't explain anything. I can't tell Drusilla what I've done; her fastidiousness would be revolted. I'm holding on to the rope of respectability—afraid to let go; and all the time the undertow drags me—tries to drag me—down—down—down. If I once let go, I'm done. If I don't let go, I'm unsatisfied. Oh, I'm in a devil of a fix, Eustace, a devil of a fix!"

He stared into the distance. A flurry of snow struck the window-pane; a few flakes found their way down the chimney, causing the smoldering fire to hiss menacingly.

"Does your wife know about your accident?" inquired Eustace.

"No," replied Adrian. "She thinks I'm playing golf at Aldeburgh. I sent her a telegram on Wednesday, inclosed it, stamped in an envelope, addressed to the postmaster at Aldeburgh. I promised to be home to-night—for dinner. . . . I had an overwhelming desire for the fleshpots of Berkeley Square, for my wife's company. I had a curious wave of revolt from—from all this. I found myself drifting back into the Adrian St. Clair you once knew. I felt an irresistible longing to break down

the wall that my wife has erected for her defense. . . . I must be home by seven. Felix Sladen is dining with us. . . . You have heard of him, have n't you? He's the head of the C.I.D. at Scotland Yard."

"I know him," said Eustace. "He often comes down here."

Adrian saw in his mind's eye the front of his house in Hill Street; in his imagination he wandered through the rooms, up the stairs, along the corridors. The home-coming would be satisfying. Then he shivered. A horrible thought became insistent. Would the machine-made life he was born to have got on his nerves by the coming Monday? Would the longing to break down the barrier between Drusilla and himself have exasperated him by its hopelessness? Would he long to come back, fight the longing, submit, and return to this room, a step lower on his path to—extinction? "Well, Eustace!" he exclaimed, turning and facing his friend. "You've heard my confession. Can you beat it?"

Eustace spoke slowly, weighing his words. "One of the two natures which every man inherits must triumph," he said. "They can't share you."

Adrian had a sudden impulse. "Listen, Eustace," he cried. "If I do go back, and stay, will you keep your eye on this girl, help her, get her away from here—if she'll go? She's worth saving."

"I'll do my best," replied Eustace quietly. "I promise."

"Thanks," said Adrian. "I know you will keep your word."

With that instinctive desire to make reparation for past errors, a form of self-indulgence peculiar to a sentimental people, Adrian tried to appease his conscience by planning an agreeable future for Vicky, a future that would give her a chance to surmount the obstacles by which she had been hampered at her birth. He was sincere in his desire for her welfare, and was not sufficiently conceited to realize the extent of her devotion to him. He might have been able to carry out these plans had not Destiny decided to play a card that she was concealing in her voluminous sleeve.

Vicky, while purchasing a packet of candles, had thought a good deal concerning Bill's suggestion of Mr. Herbert Harris's attitude. She knew that Harris was a man who usually made good his threats. That he was safely put away for a long period was little less than providential. Adrian—or rather Jim Higgins—in his present condition would be a poor match for Harris, whose strength was enormous, who rarely fought under Queensberry rules, who was crafty, ruthless, deadly as an enemy. Vicky had been able to keep him at a distance by will-power, but it had never been an easy task. Harris wanted her and intended to have her.

Now that he was impotent for the time being, Vicky felt an intense sense of relief. She refused to acknowledge the fact that she was afraid of him. But it was true.

She returned to Parker's Court with her purchase and climbed the rickety stairs. "Bit dark, ain't it?" she remarked, as she untied her parcel and placed a candle in an empty bottle, lighting it with some difficulty. Then she shivered. "It's parky out in the street," she observed. "Starting to snow. . . . There! That's better, ain't it?" she added, as the candle sulkily decided to do its bit.

"I must go," announced Eustace. "I don't think I've tired him," he added, smiling at Vicky who was removing her hat. "May I come and see you one day?"

"You better had n't," replied Vicky. Then, seeing his disappointment, "No offense, mister!" she added.

Above the faint roar of the traffic in the Commercial Road came the raucous shouts of newspaper boys, crying an extra. It was half-past six, and the final editions of the evening papers were being offered to the public.

"Can you find your way out?" inquired Adrian.

"Quite," replied Eustace. "Good night!"

He paused at the door. "I wonder what those paper boys are calling. Can you hear?"

Adrian shook his head.

"Listen," cried Eustace. "No," he added, after a slight pause, "I can't catch it. Good night!"

He left the room, and disappeared into the darkness of the staircase. The sound of his footsteps died away. Nothing could be heard but the ticking of the cheap American clock.

CHAPTER VIII

“**W**HAT did he want to talk about?” inquired Vicky.

Adrian rose, glanced at the clock, and realized the necessity for action.

“Nothing particular,” he said with that masculine vagueness that is so intensely irritating to feminine curiosity. “I must be pushing off.”

“Jim!” cried Vicky, astonished, disturbed. “You’re not goin’ to-night? Not like this—so sudden?”

“I must,” asserted Adrian. “I’ve got to see some one.”

Vicky experienced a sudden sense of dread; she could scarcely explain it to herself, but it terrified her, made her pulse race, gave her a sinking feeling. Why had Jim so unexpectedly announced this unlooked-for decision? Had it anything to do with the black-coated visitor?

“I don’t want you to go,” she protested.

“I’ve *got* to go,” he replied.

Vicky looked at him. She grudged him his detachment, his poise, his certainty of decision. She had acquired that item of knowledge so painful to

women who have given their hearts to men—the realization that a man's thoughts were his own, that his mind was a sacred temple into which her feet could not stray; that however passionately, or selflessly, he might love her, there were corridors, rooms, chapels in that heterogeneous and cosmopolitan city lying at the back of his eyes, through which she could never wander—a forbidden city, isolated, guarded, impenetrable. Even the most voluble of men keep something in reserve; even the village idiot enjoys his own private jokes; sometimes the mystery is made plain by an artist through his work. It is not always the subject of a work of art that intrigues and thrills; it is the reflection of the artist's personality, of his inner consciousness, that he has unconsciously put into his work—the subtle touch that makes it different. The story may be hackneyed, the subject banal; it is the treatment that makes it live as something newly created, something vital, immortal. It is never his choice of subject that stamps the artist; it is the point of view he brings to it. Anatole France could describe the walk of a suburban clerk from his iron-gated, paved-path villa to his crude, red-brick, utilitarian railway-station and cause his readers to chuckle at the irony of life; Wells could picture it and, in doing so, give you the life-history of the clerk, his joys and sorrows, his ambitions and disappointments, his rigid respectability, and his leanings toward socialism;

Leacock could choose the same theme and, with that touch of burlesque characteristic of the man, make it a priceless piece of foolery; Wodehouse could cause his readers to laugh at the clerk while pitying him; Somerset Maugham could picture him as the victim of his environment.

In each case, though the clerk was apparently the subject of the essay, in reality the author would be disclosing *himself* to the public gaze. It is not only the artist; it is every man who gives himself away in his work, or, if he does no work, in his amusements. Vicky was only one of millions of her sex who resented the locked door of a man's mind. It hurt her, it frightened her, it filled her with apparently unreasonable premonitions. If he went now, would he ever come back? That was the thought at the back of her mind, a thought that tore through her veil of reticence, that in its terrifying immensity metaphorically threw her down at his feet.

"You're not goin' to take on no job to-night?" she protested. "I mean—not a job that's dangerous?"

Adrian shook his head. He hated to leave her in doubt, but how could he possibly disclose his purpose in leaving her? His longing to go—to get away from all this—to break through the fog and live again once more a normal man—was so intense that he could scarcely bring himself to play the last scene in a manner consistent with the character he

had assumed. Besides, he was grateful to Vicky; he was fond of her, too, in a perfectly normal way. Except when his mind became undisciplined, when the sex-instinct dominated. Other men might protest that he was absurdly conscientious in regard to his attitude in such manners; that it would be more reasonable to satisfy these sudden passionate desires than to be eternally fighting them. He knew that the majority of men—men of his own kind—thought lightly on the question of an occasional lapse. But he himself was built differently. Drussilla would not regard such treachery as incidental. She would be shocked, horrified; she would rebel at the idea of sharing her husband.

"Jim," asked Vicky quietly. "Are you telling me the truth?"

"I've got to lie low for a bit," explained Adrian, a little vaguely.

Vicky understood. He had been arousing the suspicions of the police, and it was necessary for him to retire from active participation in the grab for other people's property. "Then you *have* been doin' something that might get found out?" she gasped.

"Yes," replied Adrian, truthfully enough. "It's all right, Vicky," he added soothingly. "Don't you worry! I'll manage to see you again soon."

Vicky looked at him, her eyes loyal, trustful, as

those of a dog. "You promise that, Jim?" she whispered. "You promise it?"

"I promise," said Adrian.

He meant to keep his word. He would see her again, and tell her as much of the truth as he dared. Those wonderful tragic eyes of hers compelled loyalty, demanded candor. To hurt her would be the act of a brute. Adrian hated cruelty. To him, as to all decent men, cruelty was the lowest form of bestiality; cruelty to dogs, cruelty to horses, cruelty to the lower animals, cruelty to children. Nations that whined about their wrongs were nearly always cruel to animals. It was a form of egomania. Adrian was one of those who devoutly hoped that there might be some special form of future punishment for those guilty of cruelty—for people who kicked dogs, used bearing-reins, allowed their keepers to put down steel traps. The world seemed full of cruelty. We were beasts, preying on one another. Civilization was a mockery. He himself would have to be cruel to Vicky—for Drusilla's sake. He had yielded to desire—to the desire for excitement, a new sensation; and some one would have to pay. He himself would pay part of the price; he would never again be free from the pricks of conscience, from regret. Vicky would pay, too; her pride would be wounded, her trust betrayed, her faith shattered. What one person did reacted on

many others. The brotherhood of man was no empty phrase. No one could play a lone hand. We were members one of each other. It was curious how fundamentally accurate some of those old biblical phrases were. Man was naturally an individualist; but men in the aggregate were social. What one did affected all. The wheel revolved; men dropped off, clung on, some sure-footed, some giddy. But the wheel itself never paused, never swerved; it persisted—immutable, relentless. How little man seemed in the scheme of things! How important he appeared when deciding his own future! How ironical life was! Were men merely actors in a farce, produced to amuse the gods; or in a tragedy to draw their tears? Were the gods addicted to tears or laughter? Could they stoop to pity? Or were they bored by their own perfection? Was the picture of man, struggling, always before their eyes? Did they, like mischievous boys, disturb an ants' nest to see what the inhabitants would do? Did they enjoy being placated with hymns and anthems? Were the clouds in the sky merely the distilled tears of the gods? Was the lightning the gleam of their teeth in ironical laughter, the thunder the echoes of their disapproval?

Adrian almost lost himself in speculation. Such reveries had been frequent lately. They disturbed him. He had never before been given to introspection, had never indulged in speculation concern-

ing the ultimate purpose of things. He had never even asked himself if there *were* a purpose. He had accepted everything, unquestioning.

He pulled himself together and turned to Vicky with genuine feeling. "I'm not going to try and thank you for looking after me," he said. "I could n't. . . . Not properly."

"You've no call to thank *me*," muttered Vicky with the ghost of a smile. "So long as you promise to come back, that's all I care about."

"I'll see you next week," said Adrian.

"Next week?" repeated Vicky mechanically. "Next *week*, Jim?" she added piteously.

"It would n't be safe before," replied Adrian.

"Right-o," said Vicky, accepting the inevitable with as much philosophy as she could summon.

She looked up at him speculatively. "You keep yourself to yourself, too . . . Don't you, Jim?" she muttered.

"Don't get angry, Vicky," he pleaded.

Vicky smiled. "I could n't be angry with *you*, Jim," she cried. "Not for long. If you could only——"

She hesitated, gave a shrug. "Oh, I dunno. . . . You've been pretty good to me. . . . That's what makes me wonder if you really——"

She hesitated once more. Her pauses were far more expressive than her words.

"What?" asked Adrian, a little puzzled.

She looked at him steadily. "Why have you never asked me to come and live with you?" she inquired.

Adrian shook his head. "I could n't," he said.

She was seated at the table, her elbows on the cloth, her chin cupped in her hands. Her eyes seemed to be piercing his—tragic eyes, with the sorrows of a hundred thousand years behind them. "Why have you never told me that you wanted me?" she asked.

"That sort of thing is n't in my line," he said.

"You're a *man*, ain't you?" cried Vicky bitterly.

Then her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, I'm sorry, Jim," she cried, sincerely repentant of her bitterness. "You've never tried to put it over me. . . . Though I'd do anything you asked me to. . . . Anything," she added, after a pregnant pause.

She was using the final prerogative of her sex, offering her greatest gift to keep him with her. There was something piteously tragic in her attitude.

It was a horrible position for Adrian. "I know, Vicky," he whispered. "I know."

"No one has never put it over me," she asserted proudly. Then her tone changed to one of pathetic humility. "But *you* could—if you wanted to," she whispered.

There was a long silence. Vicky's eyes were glued to his face.

"P'r'aps you don't want to," she muttered.
"P'r'aps, if you did, you 'd be tired of me?"

"I can't marry you, Vicky," said Adrian.

"Have I ever asked you to?" she protested.
"I 'm not that sort. . . . But I 'd rather you married me than go on leaving me—as you mean to *now*."

To Vicky and her class, marriage was, in most cases, the end of romance. Besides, what was the use of marriage for people like themselves, either of whom might at any time be put away for seven or fourteen years—perhaps for life? You never knew your luck. . . .

"I 've *got* to leave you," said Adrian.

"Whatever you do, Jim, it 's all the same to *me*," murmured Vicky mechanically, "so long as you don't leave me and not come back."

"Supposing I did n't come back," asked Adrian.

For a moment she made no movement, then she slowly turned her head and looked right into his eyes, her own full of mute protest, agony, appeal.

"Don't talk like that, Jim," she cried, her voice quivering, her limbs trembling.

His eyes grew troubled, sensing the pain he was giving her. They stood for a moment, motionless, gazing at each other, unable to speak.

A newspaper boy, passing the entrance to the court, was crying his wares. "Piper!" he yelled.

"Extry! Escape of a convict from Portland! Piper!"

His cry became fainter, was lost in the roar of the traffic.

"Some bloke's broken outer quod," whispered Vicky.

"Good luck to him!" muttered Adrian.

"Jim," cried Vicky tremulously. "Suppose it should be—suppose it should be—Herb Harris?"

"Herb Harris?" repeated Adrian mechanically.

The door was flung open, and Bill rushed in with a 6.30 edition of "The Star."

"'E's done it," cried Bill excitedly. "'E's done it! 'Erb 'Arris 'as broken outer quod! I told yer 'e would. . . . 'E's comin' ter do you in, 'e is!"

"Let's see," said Adrian, snatching the paper from Bill and reading the paragraph referred to. "Missed at six o'clock last night," he muttered, glancing at Vicky's set face. "It's about two hundred miles from Portland. If he walked, it'd take him nearly a week."

Vicky shook her head. "Herb Harris would n't walk," she protested. "He'd get the money somehow to ride."

"He would n't dare show himself in a train," said Adrian.

"I dunno," replied Vicky with a shrug.

She had that sense of the inevitability of things, a realization of the uselessness of fighting destiny.

Some queer uncanny certainty that the cards were now being dealt according to plan. It was useless to protest. What was ordained to happen would happen. There was no escape for predestined victims. It was all arranged by some curiously illogical and unscrupulously partial disposer of human destinies. Herb Harris's return was the prelude to the drama. Herb Harris knew about Jim Higgins, was determined to assert his own prior claims—claims that had no justifiable basis. It was useless to wonder what Herb Harris would do; it was all arranged, appointed, decreed. Herb Harris would come; he would do Jim in; perhaps, afterward, he would be recaptured, and swing for his folly. But what would be the good of that with Jim finished off?

Her customary pallor became more marked; the red of her lips showed up in contrast to her dead-white cheeks. Her eyes, large, haunting, tragic, rested with almost painful intensity on Adrian. Bill was chuckling with faun-like glee.

"If he came by train, he might be here to-night," said Adrian. "Anyway, to-morrow—if he's not copped."

He glanced at Vicky, noticed her attitude of passive acceptance of the situation, realized the difficulties of his own position and the necessity for protecting Vicky from the results of Harris's enmity. He could n't leave her to face Harris alone;

but he had given his word to be home to dinner at eight o'clock. His duty to Drusilla was even more important than his obligation to Vicky. Supposing he stayed, Harris arrived, followed by the police, and there was a row, a scandal, publicity. It would be ghastly for Drusilla—unforgivable to bring such a catastrophe upon her. And if he returned home, leaving Vicky to face Harris unprotected, it would be the act of a coward. What he had said to Eustace was true; he was indeed in a devil of a fix.

In any case, Harris could n't very well reach London before ten or eleven o'clock—even if he came by train and successfully evaded the police. Eleven would be the earliest hour at which Harris could reach Parker's Court—with all the luck in the world to help him. The wisest plan, therefore, would be for Adrian to return home to dinner, make some excuse of an appointment at his club, and get back to the East End somewhere in the neighborhood of eleven. By that time he might have been able to prepare some plan for getting Vicky into safety, out of Harris's reach, until the escaped convict had been securely re-arrested and sent back to Portland, well guarded.

"I can look after Herb Harris," exclaimed Vicky, whose one idea was to keep the two men apart. "It's you he's got it in for."

"I can't leave you to face him alone," replied Adrian; "but I've *got* to be up west by seven."

Vicky looked up quickly. "Up west?" she repeated.

She was suspicious, anxious, curious. What business could Jim have up west at seven o'clock—a man in his condition, only just out of bed after a serious accident? Did he need money? Was he seriously contemplating securing it—in the usual way? It was asking for trouble—while he was still stiff and sore, unable to make a quick get-away should such action be necessary. Or could it be—she hated even the thought—could it be a woman? No; such thoughts were gratuitously treacherous. Her attitude of philosophic impotence returned after the sudden angry rebellion expressed by her eyes. She continued to watch Adrian, dog-like, waiting for his decision, obedient, submissive.

"Tyke my advice and stye there," sneered Bill, always at his best in the midst of other people's perplexities.

"Can you keep out of his way?" asked Adrian. "If he comes down here, it's a hundred to one he'll be nabbed."

"I tell you I'm not afraid of Herb Harris," protested Vicky sullenly, "'cept on *your* account. He's dangerous—for *you*; he wouldn't fight fair . . . and you only jest out of bed. You could n't stand up to him. He's got arms like Jack Dempsey's."

"I've *got* to go now," said Adrian. "I've prom-

ised. But I 'll come back to night—if it 's only for ten minutes—just to see that you 're all right. That 's a promise, *too*."

Vicky conceded the ghost of a smile. "There ain't no call for you to come back," she muttered, "into danger."

"I 'll come back," replied Adrian doggedly, "with a plan for checkmating Harris."

"Right-o," said Vicky, her eyes fixed on his. "I 'll be expectin' you."

"Take care of yourself," he whispered. "Keep your door locked."

"Don't you worry about *me*," she protested, "You keep your eyes skinned for Herb Harris. I tell you he 's dangerous—dangerous."

"I don't want a row," said Adrian grimly, "with the police brought in. It would n't suit my book."

"'Ullo!" cried Bill, standing by the window and peering into the gloom of the court. "'Oo 's that cove, nosin' about down there, torkin' ter that bleedin' parson wot I met on the stairs?"

Adrian walked quickly to the window and looked out. His face when he turned showed great perplexity, even a suggestion of panic.

"Damn!" he muttered, and thought rapidly.

"Who is it?" inquired Vicky.

"The boss detective at Scotland Yard," explained Adrian with a grim chuckle.

He had seen and recognized the figure of Sir

Felix Sladen, the head of the Criminal Investigation Department, one of his own most intimate friends, whom he was to meet at dinner in less than two hours' time. If Felix were to see him and to recognize him, the game would be up. The situation was extremely perplexing.

Felix Sladen was not a man content to be merely a figurehead. He was a conscientious worker, an enthusiast, devoted to his job. He was courageous, scorned protection, made a hobby of evening prowls in dangerous neighborhoods. In his opinion, a man of education and intelligence was far more likely to develop into a successful detective than the ordinary promoted constable. His prowls round the well-known haunts of the criminal classes had been productive of satisfactory results. His manner was cool, assured, impersonal, detached. He possessed sympathy but was ruthless in his sense of duty. He loathed wire-pulling, political and social influence, any interference with the course of justice. Though virtually engaged to Pamela, Adrian's cousin by marriage, he would not allow his private feelings to influence his public duty. Adrian knew this, recognized the danger, realized this formidable addition to the obstacle race he would have to win in order to reach home. Time was passing; he should have been at Liverpool Street by now. But if Felix was to continue prowling about the court, Adrian would virtually be trapped.

Undoubtedly Felix was setting the stage for Herbert Harris's return, and making sure, with his customary conscientiousness, that everything was in order.

There was a certain divisional general who, during the last year of the war, much to the dismay of his staff, insisted on paying surprise visits to the front line in order to make certain that his men were being properly cared for; who was frequently seen well in the van of an advance, risking his life like an ordinary second lieutenant, his tall slim figure acting as a rallying-point, and his marvelous and greatly admired flow of language serving as a national anthem. He was a conscientious zealot who liked to be here, there, and everywhere, who left nothing to chance, believing in the policy of trusting the man on the spot. Felix possessed the same kind of mentality. He was not content to be merely an official, a head of department who pushed buttons and pulled strings. He had once served under the general referred to. "Never ask a man to do, or expect him to do, anything you can't do yourself," was the general's favorite maxim. Felix carried this dictum over into civil life. Like his famous predecessor in office, also a soldier, he was not easy to discipline. Permanent officials shook their heads; police inspectors stroked their chins; but the department had few failures and eventually won the approval of the press.

Before accepting the job, Felix had often sat at the long, dimly lit table at the Sheridan Club, eating a modest supper and listening to the then head of the C.I.D. describing his wanderings. Some of the tales were extraordinary, bizarre, humorous; some ghastly; some wildly exciting. The chief knew the underworld as the ordinary man of education knows Piccadilly and its environs; and the underworld knew him, respected him, fought the customary duel according to the rules of the game. He never asked questions, never appeared to be interested in anything but the topic of the moment. He possessed a vast knowledge of all sorts of odds and ends, and knew the form of almost every player in league football. In his opinion, to get at a man's motive you had to understand his environment. Atmosphere counted. Through atmosphere and environment you got a clear perspective. Also, unconsciously, he was able to carry in his head a fairly accurate map of east and south London. Had he adventured, officially protected, the enemy would have had its scouting parties out, would have been suspicious, dangerous, uncommunicative. But going alone as he did rather appealed to the criminal's idea of sport.

Felix succeeded to an even greater extent than his predecessor. He was the kind of man who could sit in company almost unnoticed. He had the gift of eliminating himself. He was a good lis-

tener; though, when the hour struck, he could dominate a situation and carry weight and authority. He dabbled in metaphysics, in science, and had been called a collector of religions. In his opinion, crime was curable. He hated the idea of shutting men up in prison, in ugly surroundings, surroundings that acted as moral incubators for future criminals. Unconsciously, perhaps, he held many of the views of the Christian Scientists. He believed that good was infinite and evil the exact opposite, that the best survived, that the vital spark of decency could be found if searched for. But he was also a slave to duty. It was his duty to lay criminals by the heels, and so, as a conscientious upholder of law and order, he allowed his sense of duty to lead him into risky situations.

If a criminal was "wanted," Felix knew fairly accurately just where that particular person was likely to be found. Of course the ordinary detective knew this, too. But Felix preferred self-acquired knowledge to that which came second-hand. He frequently surprised his own subordinates by his intimate understanding of criminal psychology. "Why keep a dog and do your own barking?" grumbled the average detective. Felix sensed this antagonism to his methods, but he was following a good precedent. "They 'll try and muzzle you," his predecessor had told him when handing over, "but you tell 'em to go to hell. There 's nothing like knowin'

the ground you 'll be shootin' over, and the kind of bird they breed. You take my tip: do your own scoutin'. It pays."

He had acted on the tip, learned the ground intimately, knew every path, every spinney, every corner. But to the ordinary casual acquaintance he was rather a detached, impersonal sort of man whose hobby was fishing, who wrote high-brow articles in stodgy magazines on the manners and customs of the hedge-sparrow, who was a constant first-nighter, a modest chess-player, and a useful last-moment dinner-table guest.

An enterprising sneak-thief with a somewhat ironic sense of humor had once stolen his favorite pearl scarf-pin, so Felix felt that he was one down in the game and was anxious to improve his form. Also he felt that a man who could steal a scarf-pin literally under his very nose was wasting unusual abilities. Such a genius might have enjoyed an innocent and blameless career in the diplomatic service, in politics, or on the music-halls. He might even have become an extremely efficient detective.

Felix hated waste. . . .

"What does he want?" inquired Vicky. "You?"

Her voice was trembling though her gaze remained steady. Adrian looked at her, jumped at the suggestion, and nodded grimly.

"Oh, Gawd!" cried Vicky, quivering. "You ain't going to be pinched?"

"No," replied Adrian, his self-control returning. "I'll slip out when his back's turned. . . . Watch the window!"

Vicky went cautiously over to the window as Bill crept across to the fireplace. "Oh, I'll be wondering where you are, and if you're safe," she muttered.

"What's he doing?" inquired Adrian.

"Talkin'," said Vicky laconically. "Now he's turning and walking toward the street. . . . The parson's with him. . . . They're talking some more—shakin' hands. . . ."

Adrian moved across to the door, clutched the handle.

"He's comin' back," cried Vicky warningly.

There was a long, tense pause. Bill crept toward the table; Vicky and Adrian remained motionless. Down below a door closed. Footsteps could be heard ascending the stairs. They paused on the landing outside the door.

"If he comes in," whispered Adrian, "blow out the candle."

Vicky signified her acquiescence with a nod. They listened—breathlessly. Bill stood, his hand on the candle, finger moistened, ready to extinguish the flame and stop any smoldering. Then each unconsciously heaved a sigh of relief, for the footsteps began to ascend the stairs up to the next floor—a room which had formerly been occupied by Harris.

"Who lives up there?" whispered Adrian.

"Herb Harris used to," explained Vicky.

A door was opened violently. Footsteps could be heard overhead.

"Now 's my chance," muttered Adrian. "So-long," he added, cautiously opening the door. "Ten o'clock—I 'll be here!"

He listened, slipped out upon the landing, closed the door softly, and rapidly descended the stairs.

Vicky returned to the window, her breath coming quickly, her forehead damp with perspiration.

Up-stairs a door banged. Some one was quickly coming down the stairs with firm but light steps, making no attempt at concealment. There was a sudden cessation of movement outside on the landing.

Vicky gave a gasp of relief; she had seen Adrian's figure cross the court and disappear into the darkness of the passage leading to the Commercial Road. "He 's got away," she whispered.

The footsteps continued to descend the stairs—more slowly, in a manner suggestive of an actively functioning mind controlling them. "Thank Gawd!" muttered Vicky, glancing at Bill, who was furtively sneaking Adrian's packet of cigarettes.

The falling snow deadened the sound of traffic; in the distance, a clock chimed the half-hour. Vicky shivered and mended the fire.

In a third-class smoking-carriage of the Great

Western Railway Herbert Harris, admirably camouflaged into the likeness of a small farmer or country tradesman, watched the lights of Reading rush by, wondering how he was to satisfy his already gnawing hunger before starting on the last lap of his pilgrimage to Parker's Court.

In her exquisitely shaded bedroom at Hill Street, Drusilla was anxiously awaiting Adrian's return. She had come to a decision; and, though the decision frightened her, it thrilled her still more with its promise of future happiness.

"It was a pretty close shave," muttered Adrian to himself as he hailed a taxi outside Liverpool Street Station and directed the chauffeur to drive to Hill Street.

CHAPTER IX

A COMFORTABLE fire was burning in the large open fireplace of the hall. A carved screen divided the inner from the outer hall. Through its openings the broad twisting staircase could be seen. At the end of the inner hall, which was reminiscent of a country-house, opposite from the fireplace, a window looked out on to Hill Street. Beyond the fireplace, a door opened into the billiard-room. At right angles to this door was another window, opening on to the roof of the kitchen and servants' quarters. In summer this roof was the receptacle for orange-trees in tubs. Steps led from it down to the yard. Opposite the billiard-room door stood a desk, its back to the wall which faced the front door.

Pamela, a curiously potent personality, modern, restless, picturesque, attractive, a trifle sudden in her manner, with a trick of irony in her attitude toward life, came down the stairs, a cloak on her arm supplying a vivid splash of color in contrast with her mole-colored frock of *crêpe de chine*, her pale cheeks, her blue-black hair. Her dress was short—obviously a dancing-frock, cut low, showing bare

arms and silk-clad legs. Her charm was more boyish than feminine. She threw her cloak upon a long couch near the window and lit a cigarette.

Drusilla, who was presiding over the coffee-cups, looked up questioningly. "Are you going out, Pam?" she inquired, handing a cup of black coffee to her cousin.

"I dunno," replied Pamela, helping herself to sugar.

Lady Rolls, who was seated close to the fire, from which she shielded her admirably arranged complexion, gazed at Pamela meditatively. Pamela fascinated her, interested her, irritated her. Lady Rolls liked the modern girl, found her stimulating. Pamela was such a complete contrast to Drusilla. Drusilla was restful; Pamela was n't. Drusilla had such exquisite manners; Pamela had none. Drusilla apparently was always delighted to see her friends; Pamela looked at them as though she wondered why they had come. Pamela's mole-colored evening-frock almost made Drusilla's black charmeuse appear old-fashioned. Pamela unconsciously displayed her clothes; Drusilla's were part of herself. Lady Rolls adored clothes, understood them, thought of them with an almost religious fervor, could talk about them for hours. In her creed Hanover Square was the Mecca of all really nice women. She herself bought her clothes in Hanover Square;

so did Drusilla; so did Pamela. In that they were united; in other matters utterly different.

Pamela was crazy about dancing; dancing kept her from brooding about life. She was at the age when life seems a monstrously unfair proposition. She wanted things that were obviously beyond her reach. To be given desires without the possibility of gratifying them seemed to her unjust. She was critical; at least, she thought so. She was really unsatisfied, discontented. She had not found herself. Consequently she criticized people. Particularly Drusilla. She was very fond of Drusilla, but Drusilla's treatment of Adrian was foolish. She was so fond of Adrian herself that she expressed her feelings unsatisfactorily. She criticized him frankly—to prove her interest in him. This constant criticism annoyed Drusilla and amused Adrian. She had not reached that advanced stage of matured mentality when the fact that one does n't know everything hits one in the face. Pamela was certain that her views of life were the right and only views. This immature arrogance is at times irritating to older people. But Pamela considered that people who disagreed with her were old-fashioned, even touchy. She was sorry for them. It was such a pity not to move with the times. She went to the theater in a captious spirit, criticized the acting—acting that, to the older generation, had be-

come hallowed from associations—adored inexperienced flappers whom critics like herself had rushed into stardom before learning the a-b-c of their art, and patronized the minority—those half-dozen really clever people who had worked hard to win their positions. She criticized plays, too, and books. Plays must be exciting all the time to please her. There must be no development of character. To sit for two hours watching a play without being able to pronounce her own views was too great an ordeal for the young girl of to-day. She wanted to be amused all the time. She dreaded boredom. She found it difficult to read a book without disagreeing with everything the author said. She possessed an instinctive sense of opposition. And yet, despite her disabilities, she was extraordinarily attractive.

Sir Felix Sladen thought so. He had surrendered—horse, foot, and guns. But Pamela, with that fundamental honesty of the young girl of the present day, had told him frankly that she could n't make up her mind. She liked him. She did n't love him. If she married him, she 'd stick to him; therefore she could n't marry him until she knew for certain how dominant his attraction for her really was.

In her own heart she believed that no man could ever be to her what Adrian was. But even about that she was n't sure. It was her terrifying uncer-

tainty of mind that gave her that irritating certainty in speech. She shouted to keep herself from thinking.

"It is n't much use going to a dance without a man," said Pamela, sipping her coffee and smoking jerkily.

"Take Adrian," suggested Lady Rolls.

Pamela shook her head. "Adrian won't go. He says he has an engagement."

Drusilla looked up, surprised and perturbed. Adrian had n't been home more than two hours. Could he have grown restless again already? She wanted to talk to him, had made up her mind to face facts, was even now grudging the waste of time demanded by courtesy. She was so afraid of losing her courage. Surely Adrian *could n't* want to go out again to-night. . . .

"Did he tell you what the engagement was?" she inquired.

Pamela shook her head. When she had asked Adrian to take her to the dance, he had merely replied: "Sorry, old thing! Can't be done! I've got a date." His reticence had infuriated Pamela. She had prided herself on the supposition that he had no secrets from her. Her annoyance had made her cattish. She was determined to punish him. In her ignorance, she believed that rudeness was a form of punishment grueling to a man, so pathetic was her belief in herself.

"Does Adrian go out a great deal?" asked Lady Rolls.

"He plays golf," replied Drusilla, as though golf were an excuse for everything. However much she might resent Adrian's absence, she never showed her resentment. Her breeding was too perfect, her loyalty too fundamental.

"Not at night," said Pamela.

Hurt herself, she wanted to hurt Drusilla. She thought she had no illusions about Adrian, and wanted Drusilla to have none. Had she been a mother, the more she adored her child the more conscientiously she would have pointed out its faults. It was another form of youthful arrogance.

Drusilla smiled. "And bridge," she suggested quickly.

"Oh," said Lady Rolls. "I thought he had none of the minor vices."

Adrian came through the hall and joined the coffee-drinking circle. He was now himself, moderately tall, with an excellent figure, easy, reserved, fastidious, courteous, pleasantly genial, perfectly dressed without exaggeration. But underneath his outward semblance of contentment with his surroundings, he was at high tension, strung up, restless. He was picturing the return of Herbert Harris, mentally following that menacing person's progress, wondering if Vicky was all right, anxiously watching the clock. His promise bound him to

return to Parker's Court. He could n't break his word; but his instinct cried out to him to stay where he was, to renounce his madness permanently, to cut out forever the danger of exposure. For he knew now—he had realized the fact on his return to Hill Street—that he was cured; that never again would he desire to run amuck; that even if Drusilla remained cold and unresponsive, he himself would be content to patch up some sort of a *modus vivendi*. He was cured; and a deep song of thankfulness was in his heart. He was cured; yet his word bound him, and he must go back once more—to-night, in less than an hour, with a plan to insure Vicky's safety. And all the time some monitor in his brain whispered to him that he was risking shipwreck to his life with Drusilla, to everything that life meant to them both, to his good name, to his honor, to his future.

Notwithstanding these warnings, he must go. Honor demanded it. No matter what happened, at ten o'clock he must be back in his rough clothes, in that fetid sink that was a living denial of London's boasted civilization—that monument to the greed of landlords, to a system that bred thieves, prostitutes, paupers, and all the scum of a great city's population, victims of the economic problem no politician was courageous enough to solve.

He glanced at Drusilla. How exquisite she looked, seated there, pensively gazing at the fire!

How young, how delicate, how full of sensibility! She cloaked herself in the voluminous garment her tutors had spun for her; but, pull the cloak from her shoulders, and her sensitiveness, her vulnerability, her pitiful defenselessness would be exposed. She had none of the stamina so necessary for modern life. She felt things too deeply, though apparently she refused to feel. Had he ever known the real Drusilla? He had married the finished product, marked A1 in the social register, wound up, guaranteed to last, her perfectly arranged compartments conscientiously filled with a few conventional opinions, a number of recognized prejudices, a sense of the importance of her own class, a store of the right words and phrases for the right occasions, and a clockwork mechanism that invariably caused the right things to be done in the right way. A complete and finished social product, a perfect specimen, drilled, obedient, unquestioning. And Adrian had accepted it, welcomed it, kept its works oiled and its covering well brushed. Had he ever attempted to understand the real Drusilla—half concealed, frightened, wide-eyed, questioning—the Drusilla that training and convention had taken great pains to destroy? No; he himself was largely to blame. He loved her, but he had never tried to understand her. He was merely a man—possessive—with big feet; his ears were not attuned

to catch the almost inaudible note that displayed the key of the real Drusilla.

Just as human nature is divided into types that persist and repeat themselves (astrologers have tried to explain the mystery), so to every human being is given a note in the world symphony, its tiny contribution to the universal orchestra; some have faulty instruments; some cannot keep in time, and the Conductor regretfully dispenses with their services. But some day the orchestra will be perfect, and then the results will be the most gloriously harmonious song of triumph that has ever been written in the records of time. There will be no shuffling in seats, no whispering, no laughing in the auditorium. The symphony will be played by experts, and the mystery of life made clear. . . .

"Where is Sir Felix?" inquired Drusilla.

"Telephoning," explained Adrian.

"It must be rather trying never to be able to get away from one's work," remarked Lady Rolls, whose idea of heaven was a kind of never-ending London season where only the very nicest and smartest people were received, from which all bores were excluded, and where every woman had unlimited credit from her dressmaker.

"He does n't allow the criminal classes to take a holiday," replied Adrian, accepting a cup of coffee from Drusilla and stirring it thoughtfully.

"I'm sorry Theodore could n't come."

"He was telegraphed for to go to Monte Carlo for a consultation," explained Lady Rolls. "A profiteer with neurasthenia. But the fee is worth the fatigue of the journey."

"Quite," agreed Adrian.

"A hundred guineas a day and his expenses," continued Lady Rolls. "I wish *I* was a profiteer. . . . How you can spend the winter in England when you don't have to is a puzzle to *me!*"

"Adrian dislikes going abroad," said Drusilla.

"Why don't *you* go?" asked Lady Rolls.

"I should hate to go alone," replied Drusilla, glancing at Adrian, who was unconsciously looking at his watch and frowning.

Drusilla shivered. Why was Adrian so anxious about the time? Why had he said nothing to her about going out again?

"Don't you know, Hilda, that Adrian and Drusilla are a most united couple?" protested Pamela with a suggestion of irony in her tone.

Adrian walked over to the window and looked out. It was snowing hard, and the street and pavements were white.

"Everybody who knows them knows that," said Lady Rolls.

"They're so placidly amiable, such devoted friends, such charming lovers," asserted Pamela. "And each is as passionless as a lamp-post."

She hitched the shoulder-strap of her frock into its correct position and lit another cigarette. Her restlessness annoyed even herself. Drusilla's poise, Adrian's detachment, Hilda Rolls's chatter—the very atmosphere of the room had got on her nerves. She wanted action—to *do* something. Sitting still politely was too tedious.

"I'm terribly passionate," sighed Lady Rolls, pretending to deplore that which she admired in herself—and cultivated. "I can't be neutral in anything."

Pamela laughed contemptuously. "Adrian and Drusilla have made neutrality a religion," she protested.

Lady Rolls looked at her. "I don't see why it should annoy you so much, Pam dear!"

Pamela gave a shrug. "I like people to have a few natural inconsistencies," she said.

Adrian turned away from the window and lit a cigarette. His own exquisitely flavored Egyptians tasted like chopped hay after a week's indulgence in "gasps." It would take him at least a week to get back his palate.

"Pamela has been using the privilege of the young to lecture me on my ignorance of life," he remarked.

Pamela looked at him mutinously. "Your courtesy to each other gets on my nerves," she asserted.

Drusilla smiled. "It's so vulgar to wrangle," she protested.

"It's so inhuman not to," snapped Pamela.

"Life would have nothing further to offer Pamela if I occasionally threw a cruelt at Drusilla," murmured Adrian thoughtfully.

"You annoy me," said Pamela. "If you're as entertaining at your club—or wherever you go to—as you are at home, your friends are privileged."

"Exploring Pamela's mind is rather like tinkering with an unexploded shell," observed Adrian, who enjoyed teasing his wife's cousin.

"She's so full of temperament," sighed Lady Rolls. "One meets it everywhere. Theodore says that temperament is merely an excuse for bad manners. Of course he does n't say that officially. Temperament has made him what he is; other people's temperaments, I mean. Fancy paying five guineas to have your temperament explained to you by an expert who does n't believe there *is* such a thing!"

Adrian seated himself on the cushioned fender. "One of the luxuries of modern civilization is being able to indulge our fancies and making one's temperament responsible," he remarked with just a touch of bitterness. He was feeling very self-critical at the moment and had a very un-British contempt for the conquered enemy. England, as a rule, betrays her friends in order to heap coal of fire on her enemies, knowing that her enemies will turn the coal into gas and sell it back to England at a

profit. She is so rigidly just to her enemies that the rights of her friends are ignored.

"Are you going to marry Sir Felix?" inquired Lady Rolls.

Pamela gave a shrug. She was wondering at Adrian's restlessness, trying to guess the reason for it.

"Pamela has n't made up her mind," said Drusilla.

"How thrilling to be married to an expert criminologist!" murmured Lady Rolls. "He'd always be looking for motives and finding out the things you did n't want him to."

She sighed regretfully. "I wish you could persuade Theodore to take up golf."

"I don't indulge in propaganda," said Adrian.

"Do you *really* play golf?" inquired Pamela.

Her tone stimulated Drusilla to protest. "Pamela, dear!" She paused and glanced at Adrian.

"Or is golf just camouflage for a scheme to get away from *us*?" continued Pamela, heedless of the protest.

Adrian laughed. "Of course I don't really play golf," he replied.

"Adrian," protested Drusilla.

"I'm not a Scotsman," explained Adrian. "I merely sit in the club-house and swank."

Drusilla had very little perception of irony. She

accepted most statements at their own valuation—as much as a woman can. Adrian would certainly be the last man to exaggerate his own virtues. He had none of that terrible desire to shine, either in sport or in conversation, that so many men possessed. A swanking husband is a bitter pill for any wife to swallow; most women would rather be married to a confirmed roué than to a cad. A woman can forgive infidelity but not breach of taste. Unfaithfulness is a lapse, caddishness a chronic disability. Adrian would never flaunt his unfaithfulness; he would be ashamed of it.

“I hope Drusilla will persuade you to take her to Monte Carlo,” said Lady Rolls.

Adrian looked up curiously. “To Monte Carlo?” he repeated. Then he looked at Drusilla and back to Lady Rolls. “Why?”

“Theodore says it’s the finest air in the world for insomnia,” she asserted.

Adrian frowned and looked questioningly at Drusilla. “Have n’t you been sleeping?” he inquired.

“Not very well,” replied Drusilla.

“Why did n’t you tell me?” he asked.

“I did n’t want to worry you,” she explained.

Adrian hesitated. “You used to sleep like a child,” he protested.

Drusilla smiled. “It’s only temporary,” she said.

"Is there any cause for it?" he asked.

"Nothing tangible," replied Drusilla, lowering her eyes.

"I'm awfully sorry," murmured Adrian, his conscience telling him once more that he was to blame.

"Do persuade him to go," urged Pamela, challenging Drusilla, and wondering how Adrian would receive the suggestion. She knew that, if Adrian was averse from going, no amount of persuasion would have any effect; and, when she was in one of her aggressive moods, she enjoyed creating problems for other people to solve.

"Why should I persuade him," asked Drusilla quietly, "when I know he hates going?"

Pamela loathed meekness. Such a quality was unfeminine, Victorian, prehistoric. The modern woman should never be negative. It was such a confession of inferiority.

"Why don't you *say* you want to go, Adrian?" she cried impatiently. "Even if you don't mean it, surely Drusilla's health is of more importance than your hidebound habits?"

Adrian looked at Drusilla, his pulses hammering out the flying seconds. "Drusilla's health is of supreme importance," he said.

"Then promise," challenged Pamela.

"Oh, Pam!" protested Drusilla wearily. "Don't worry Adrian!"

Pamela made an impatient movement. "Adrian ought to live in a glass case," she cried.

"Pam's right," exclaimed Adrian, coming back to the present with a start. "We'll go next week."

Drusilla bit her lip. "I'm sorry Pam forced you to give in," she murmured.

"It's rather a score to win such a concession," observed Pam.

"I'll wire to the Hermitage for rooms," announced Adrian.

"Thank you, Adrian," said Drusilla quietly. She wanted to say more, to express her thanks sincerely, graciously, but found it almost impossible. Her reticence had become part of her, characteristic, difficult to surmount. She would say nothing rather than say the wrong thing. . . . Perhaps Adrian would understand.

Adrian looked at his watch, observed that Pamela was watching him, fidgeted uncomfortably.

"I hope we're not boring you," said Pamela.

"You could n't," replied Adrian with a twinkle.

"What is the time?" inquired Lady Rolls.

"Nine twenty," said Adrian.

"I must go," explained Lady Rolls. "Such a bore! Theodore got that wire after his secretary had gone, and I shall have to spend the evening telephoning to his patients, postponing their appointments."

"My best salaams to Theodore when you write,"

said Adrian, endeavoring to hide his relief at her departure.

"I wish Theodore would prescribe Monte Carlo for *me*," sighed Lady Rolls. "When one's there, one forgets the value of money."

"I never go near the rooms," said Drusilla. "They're always so crowded. I detest a crowd."

Lady Rolls, cloaked, talkative, full of excuses for her sudden flight, was accompanied to the front door by Drusilla. Her car was waiting.

Adrian looked at Pamela, realized that she was challenging him, wished that the child would sometimes respect his desire for silence, then philosophically laid himself out to be responsive.

Pamela was thinking, "Now that we're alone he'll be frank with me."

Adrian was wondering how much longer Felix Sladen would be at the telephone and whether he had heard anything about Harris.

CHAPTER X

“**W**HY did you suddenly give in?” inquired Pamela.
“I’m worried,” he replied, “about Drusilla.”

Pamela made an impatient movement. “There’s nothing the matter with Drusilla,” she said, “but too much placidity.”

Adrian looked at her curiously. “Then why were you so keen on our going?” he asked.

Pamela laughed. “I wanted to see if you *would* give in.”

“I must be a sore trial to you,” said Adrian.

He annoyed Pamela by not taking her seriously. His imperturbable attitude stimulated her to say more than she intended. Had he confided in her, hinted that he was unhappy, shown perplexity or despair, Pamela would have been loyal, sympathetic, friendly. But his detachment was aggravating, almost humiliating, and she therefore disdained to wear the velvet glove. Humor was not her long suit, and in her sarcastic moods she invariably became personal.

"I wish you sometimes wore the wrong clothes," she said. "Is it true that your tailor talks in hushed whispers when you enter his shop, and raises his hat when your name is mentioned?"

"Quite," replied Adrian.

"I suppose you 'd have a fit if you had to wear the same collar twice?" she cried tauntingly.

"Undoubtedly," said Adrian. "But don't worry," he added soothingly. "I 've plenty of collars."

"Oh!" exclaimed Pamela, thoroughly exasperated. "Don't you ever feel you want to break away and run in circles?"

Adrian laughed. "If I ran in circles, I might bite my own tail," he remarked.

"Better that," replied Pamela scornfully, "than acquire fatty degeneration of the emotions."

Drusilla, having speeded Lady Rolls on her way, came back into the hall, glanced at Adrian and Pamela, realized that they were unconscious of her absence, sighed, and, turning, went slowly up-stairs.

Adrian was making it very difficult for her; he was not giving her a chance to unburden her mind. It was almost as though he were purposely avoiding any intimacy, fearful of being left alone with her. Perhaps she was misjudging him! Perhaps it had n't occurred to him that she wanted to be alone with him! Perhaps he had given up desiring her surrender! Perhaps he no longer wanted her, was content with things as they were, was willing to let

them go on without any further effort to understand her! Perhaps she had killed his love, his need of her, by her own folly, her frightful, unnatural fastidiousness! The idea threw her into a panic. What a fool she had been! She was n't really an abnormal woman. She wanted his love, wanted it as she had never before wanted anything. Her shrinking from that which was elemental in him had been artificial, the result of her dislike of giving herself away. She had wanted him to woo her again, gently, gradually, chivalrously. To her, it had been like starting their married life all over again. To him, obviously his absence had been only an incident. She realized intensely, almost tragically, her ignorance of men. Was it too late? Could she carry out her intention of telling him how foolish she had been? Would her candor embarrass him? Must they go on living this artificial life, being friends, companions, passionless, gradually drifting apart? No, it was impossible.

She must make the effort; and, if it failed, she must accept failure as the result of her own ignorance, and reconstruct her life with as much philosophy as she could muster. But the effort must be made. It must be made to-night, while she had the courage, while her determination was dominant.

She went up to her room and looked at herself in the mirror. She was murmuring little prayers, a habit she had acquired during the war when her

life had been one long prayer for Adrian's safety. After a while she returned to the hall.

Meanwhile, Pamela and Adrian were continuing their conversation.

"You're not very responsive, Adrian, are you?" said Pamela in a low voice.

Adrian looked puzzled. "Responsive to what?" he asked.

"To your opportunities," she replied. "Women like you."

"They interest *me*," said Adrian.

Pamela drew in her breath rapidly. "Dispassionately, always dispassionately," she protested. "When you've been dancing, have n't you ever had a wild impulse to kiss your partner?"

Adrian laughed. "I've managed to conceal it," he replied.

"Yes," said Pamela irritably, "you manage to conceal a good deal."

She rose and sat by him on the fender. Her manner changed; she became more serious, less arrogant, gentler. "Do you think I ought to marry Sir Felix?" she asked.

"He's a good fellow," replied Adrian reflectively. Then he turned to her, sensed the fact that she was in need of sympathy, and put his hand on hers with a suggestion of brotherly intimacy.

"Do you think he could make you happy?" inquired Adrian.

Pamela shook her head and pulled down her skirt. Then she looked up at him, almost wistfully. "No one could," she admitted. "I'm too critical—or too arrogant. The worst of marriage is that you can never be *yourself*. I should want to know everything he was thinking, and at the same time I should hate him to know what *I* was thinking. . . . I've never given myself away to any one but *you*."

She held his eyes. Her own were mysterious. To a man less chivalrous than Adrian, they might have carried an invitation. She was telling him, in her own peculiar way, how much he meant to her. She would have been content with a tacit acknowledgement of the fact that he understood. But Adrian was so utterly unconscious of any subtlety that his affectionate friendliness was like a stab. And yet, once having started, she had to continue.

"I'm pretty good at keeping secrets," said Adrian.

Pamela shivered. It was useless to hint at things with a man like Adrian; one had to use direct methods. "I'm awfully fond of you, Adrian," she explained, looking at him quite frankly, with almost embarrassing directness.

Adrian laughed. "Your method of proving it keeps me from being unduly conceited," he protested.

Pamela threw away her cigarette and conceded a tiny smile. "Don't you realize that I'm making love to you?" she asked.

"It's a cousinly privilege," explained Adrian.

He glanced at his watch. In another ten minutes he must go. He wished Pamela didn't so constantly desire these embarrassingly intimate heart-to-heart conversations. The younger generation was so egotistical. And he wanted to talk to Drusilla.

He was worried, too, at Sir Felix Sladen's long session at the telephone.

"Why are you in such a hurry to be off?" inquired Pamela who, like most of her sex, was highly observant. "Where are you going, Adrian?"

"To my club," replied Adrian promptly. He hated lying, but the lie was necessary. After to-night he could cut out this sort of thing. "I have an appointment that I can't break," he added.

"Oh," said Pamela.

There are many ways in which a woman says "Oh." It is a useful word to her; it means a great deal or it means nothing. Few men can translate the exclamation accurately.

Pamela smiled and looked at her shoes. Her smile was more translatable than her exclamation. Then she looked up at him, her expression more youthful, clear of subtleties, a totally different Pamela from the one of five minutes before.

"Don't I talk a lot of nonsense?" she said.

"You must n't trifle with Sladen's young affections," protested Adrian gravely.

Pamela sniffed. "A man is n't worth serious consideration until he's forty," she replied.

Adrian laughed. "At thirty a man regrets his youth; at forty he looks forward to it."

Pamela rose impatiently. "What a long time Sir Felix is!" she remarked. Then, looking at her reflection in the mirror, "Do you think I ought to powder my nose?" she asked.

"Well," replied Adrian judiciously, "it depends on what your intentions are."

"You're a ridiculous person," said Pamela. "I shall powder it, anyway."

With a little nod and a rather pathetic smile, she turned away from the mirror and went slowly up-stairs.

A few minutes later, Emmett brought in a tray on which there stood a decanter of whisky, a siphon, some tumblers, and a carafe containing lemonade.

"Excuse me, sir," he remarked, putting down the tray and collecting the coffee-cups, "I can't find your suit-case—the one you take away with you."

"I must have left it at Liverpool Street," replied Adrian reflectively. "I'll send for it to-morrow."

"Then you are not going away to-night, sir?" inquired Emmett, a little surprised.

"Only for the evening," explained Adrian. "I

may be back rather late. Don't sit up! . . . And get me my coat and hat."

"Very good, sir," said Emmett.

As the butler disappeared, Adrian took up an evening paper, glanced at it, threw it down, went over to the window, saw that it was still snowing, shivered, and turned to go into the outer hall.

Drusilla, descending the stairs, noticed his movement. "You're not going out, Adrian?" she asked.

Adrian hesitated. "I must," he replied.

"Where's Pamela?" inquired Drusilla, moving over to the fireplace.

"Powdering her nose," explained Adrian.

"She's very devoted to *you*, Adrian," said Drusilla, turning and looking at him gravely. "Married men seem to possess an extraordinary attraction for the modern girl."

Adrian smiled. "They're so safe to practice on," he replied.

"It's lucky for her that you don't take it seriously," remarked Drusilla.

Adrian hesitated for a moment, waiting for Emmett to bring his hat and coat, then suddenly came down to the fireplace and looked at Drusilla questioningly. "Has there been any particular cause for your not sleeping?" he asked.

"I don't think so," replied Drusilla after an almost imperceptible pause. "Pam says you have an engagement to-night," she added, a little ner-

vously. "I'm sorry you can't go to this dance with her."

"So am I," said Adrian.

Drusilla sighed. "Pam's so restless, so uncertain," she explained.

"She's only a child suffering from growing-pains," protested Adrian.

Drusilla shook her head. "She seems to have an extraordinary comprehension of what men need," she continued. "If you had married a girl of her type, would she have satisfied you?"

"Even Pam has built a wall round herself," muttered Adrian, almost mechanically.

Drusilla shivered. "I don't satisfy you," she whispered, half inaudibly. "Do I, Adrian?"

"My dear!" cried Adrian impulsively, then with an effort, pulled himself up. "You rest me," he added quietly.

Drusilla shook her head. She wanted to be frank concerning herself, equally frank concerning Adrian. "Why should you need rest?" she asked. "You have no worries. Life has always been made smooth for you."

She gazed at him for a moment, as though she were trying to tap his mind. "You'd tell me if you were worried?" she said. "Wouldn't you, Adrian?"

"I'd try to," he replied.

He took both her hands, looking earnestly into

her eyes. "If I were to tell you of all the impulses, of all the contradictions that sometimes race through a man's mind, would you understand, or would you be shocked?"

Drusilla trembled, bit her lip, made a great effort to control her feelings. "I don't know, Adrian," she murmured. "I don't know."

"Then I'd better not risk a confession," said Adrian, half seriously.

She was giving him the opening he so passionately desired, and circumstances had so arranged themselves that he was unable to take advantage of it. How could he tell her everything that was in his heart when in less than ten minutes he would have to leave the house, risking danger, perhaps exposure—a scandal, publicity, social ruin? Besides, he longed to finish off the episode, put it behind him, come to her clear of all entanglements, assure her that his madness was over and would never be repeated. At the moment he was n't free, he had a promise to keep, a duty to perform. But Drusilla, having opened the gate, could not be satisfied to remain static.

"If you gave me the keys to your locked drawers," she said, "I think I should be afraid to open them."

"Supposing you found them empty?" asked Adrian.

"Supposing I found them full of puzzles that I could n't put together," she protested.

Adrian looked at her questioningly. "Would n't your love for me help you to find the solution?" he inquired.

Drusilla smiled—rather pitifully. "I have always loved you, Adrian," she said.

"Is that true?" he cried eagerly.

Drusilla nodded. "I have loved you because you were . . . *you*," she whispered.

"Because I'm what Pamela says," inquired Adrian almost grimly, "as passionless as a lamp-post?"

Drusilla hedged, as women do, answering a question with a question. "Could I go *on* loving you," she asked, "if I found you were some one else—a stranger?"

"Yes," cried Adrian eagerly. "Could you?"

Drusilla shivered. She hated this pulling down of barriers, of reserves, of probing accepted things; yet she realized that, to prove her strength, she must expose her weakness. "People were happier before they started questioning things," she protested.

"Then the passionless lamp-post appeals to you?" he insisted.

"Adrian," she cried, hurt, and a little frightened. "You speak almost bitterly!"

"I was wondering," muttered Adrian gazing into the fire.

"What?" she asked.

"How you'd take it," he explained, "if I *did* throw off the mask and domino."

"The mask and domino?" she repeated, puzzled, wishing he would speak in plain language.

"Of civilization's non-stop masquerade," he said.

Drusilla shook her head. "I don't understand you," she protested. "I wish I did."

Then she moved toward him, eagerly responsive, inviting him to make confidences, her pride fighting her longing to lay her head on his shoulder, her fastidious detachment surrendering to her need of his love. "Do you realize," she whispered, "that this is the most intimate talk you and I have ever had?"

In a moment they would have been in each other's arms, reticence conquered, true to themselves, ready to understand—and to forgive. But Pamela came running down the stairs, whistling a rag-time, and was joined in the hall by Sir Felix Sladen.

"You *have* been a time," said Pamela.

"Sorry," replied Sir Felix. "I'm rather rushed. I've got to get down to the East End."

They came into the inner hall together. Drusilla was standing by the fireplace, gracefully detached, the perfect hostess. Adrian was glancing at the evening paper. No one could have suspected their exasperated resentment of the sudden interruption.

Sir Felix Sladen was a quiet, pleasant, easy man

of the world, in the middle forties; his chief characteristics were a pair of remarkably piercing gray eyes and an apparently equable temperament. His firm chin denoted strength of purpose. He was of medium height, clean-shaven save for a small closely clipped mustache; his hair was touched with gray and was carefully brushed to hide the growing baldness. His voice suggested authority, discipline, good humor, ruthlessness in regard to duty.

"Will you have some coffee?" inquired Drusilla.

"No, thank you," replied Sir Felix. "Emmett brought me some."

"Cigarette?" suggested Adrian, offering the silver box.

"Thanks," said Sir Felix, taking a cigarette.

"Why have you got to go down into the East End?" asked Pamela.

"Felix always puts the criminals to bed," explained Adrian. "I expect some of them need a lot of tucking up. He looks upon half of the world as criminals and the other half as waiting to be found out. . . . Although he's much too polite to say so. . . . How would you describe a criminal, Felix? As one who differs from the majority? Or as the result of hereditary taints? Or as the victim of environment?"

Sir Felix smiled. Although he liked Adrian, personally, he considered him to be little more than a luxury-loving, dilettante hedonist.

"I rarely make sweeping generalities concerning matters I know very little about."

"But you are an authority," protested Adrian.

"Officially," replied Sir Felix coolly. "Unofficially, they puzzle me as much as they interest me."

"Then," cried Adrian challengingly, "as a taxpayer, may I ask what you're doing at Scotland Yard?"

"You may," said Sir Felix imperturbably. "But I shall want notice of the question."

He smoked thoughtfully for a moment. "At the moment," he added, "I'm rather keen on finding an escaped convict."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Drusilla with a shudder.

"Poor devil," said Adrian sympathetically. "Do you think you'll catch him?"

"Yes," replied Sir Felix. "I think we shall. He's a tough proposition—an elemental brute, with a genius for planning and executing robberies on a big scale. Caught in the act, he nearly killed a policeman and was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude. He got away last night, managed to elude the guards, broke into a house just outside Upwey, and stole a suit of clothes. We think he's on the way to London."

"Why should he come to London?" inquired Pamela.

"A desire for revenge," explained Sir Felix. "He wants to make it hot for some one who apparently did him some injury. If he tries it on, he 'll walk straight into the cordon we 've got stretched round the district where he used to live."

Adrian had some difficulty in restraining an exclamation. This necessary precaution made his own position even more difficult and distinctly more dangerous. How could he explain his presence down there if the police questioned him? Supposing Felix himself were to find him?

"He 'll walk into a trap?" suggested Adrian coolly.

"I hope so," replied Sir Felix.

Pamela was interested. Crime has a curious fascination for the majority; witness the crowded courts of murder trials, and the space given in the newspapers to such matters: the intimate details, the interviews with the friends and relatives of the accused. "What 's he like?" she inquired. "Have you ever seen him?"

"No," said Sir Felix. "Although he possesses all the successful criminal's vanity, he was too canny ever to be photographed; but some of my men know him. The trained observer usually acquires a marvellous memory for faces—even when disguised."

"That 's very interesting," remarked Adrian casually.

"You come across some curious freaks of destiny in a job like mine," asserted Sir Felix. "One learns to be surprised at nothing. I suppose," he added with a whimsical smile, "we are all more or less potential criminals."

"How does a man fall to these depths?" inquired Drusilla.

Sir Felix gave a shrug. "Drink . . . gambling . . . women," he replied.

Drusilla shuddered.

"I should like to study such types," said Pamela. Then, turning to Sir Felix, "Take me down to the slums," she suggested.

Sir Felix shook his head. "You 'd be shocked," he protested.

"Nothing shocks Pamela," remarked Adrian, "except prudery."

"It 's dangerous," said Sir Felix.

"*You* go," replied Pamela.

"It 's my job," explained Sir Felix.

"Not to go alone—unofficially—at night—as you often do," said Pamela.

The idea of Pamela exploring the haunts of criminals shocked Drusilla. It was not a girl's job. "I 'd rather you did n't go, Pam dear," she pleaded.

"I 'm not a child," protested Pamela irritably. "It must be thrillingly drab—like Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky."

Sir Felix shook his head. The limitations of her sex were not admitted by Pamela. "Take me to-night," she pleaded.

"Impossible," replied Sir Felix.

"Oh!" cried Pamela, thoroughly exasperated. "You're as bad as Adrian! *He* won't take me to a dance; *you* won't take me for a joy-ride. . . . I don't like you at all."

"I'll take Adrian," suggested Sir Felix, "if he cares to go."

"Good Lord, no!" replied Adrian. "It is n't *my* pidgin. The Gaiety Theater is far enough east for *me*."

Pamela fumed. "If I were a man," she protested angrily, "I would n't go to sleep in a glass case!"

Adrian was playing the semi-ironical, politely incredulous dilettante to the life. It had suddenly occurred to him that some form of excuse for his presence in the East End might be useful, if well substantiated, in the event of discovery. His brain was alert, though his poise was convincingly blasé.

"I'd undertake to find your escaped convict without the aid of a cordon of detectives," he asserted, "if I was n't so infernally lazy."

Sir Felix became frankly discouraging. "The amateur detective is the bane of my official existence," he remarked. "The methods of the late lamented *Sherlock Holmes* were admirable—in fiction—but in actual detection they would n't cut much

ice. The real detective has to trust very largely to the goddess of luck and to the laws of coincidence. He knows that, as most men eventually have to pay for their mistakes, most criminals will eventually have to account for their crimes. Nemesis may take her time, but she usually wins. A knowledge of psychology is a greater asset to a detective than a genius for deduction."

"Quite," said Adrian. "But, in fiction, the amateur always wins."

"Fiction," replied Sir Felix shortly, "is written for a credulous public. And a detective-story is a puzzle to which its creator has the key."

"One of these days," remarked Adrian in his best Hill Street manner, "when I feel in the mood, I'll prove that the amateur has his points. What do you do?" he inquired casually. "Search the houses?"

"We bang the big drum," replied Sir Felix dryly, "to announce our arrival, having previously arranged for the popular press to be well represented."

Adrian changed his tactics. "Know anything about the fellow your escaped convict wants to do in?" he asked.

"Very little," said Sir Felix. "Only that there's a woman in the case."

Drusilla shivered. Pamela looked up, interested.

"If I knew who he was," added Sir Felix meditatively, "I'd warn him to keep out of the way."

"Quite," murmured Adrian.

There was a slight pause. Adrian gazed thoughtfully at the fire; Drusilla was absorbed in the task that confronted her. Pamela made an impatient movement, rose, and stood by Sir Felix.

"You told me you'd do everything I wanted," she said, "if I married you."

Sir Felix looked at her steadily. "You have n't said you'd marry me—yet."

"I said I'd think about it," replied Pamela. "I'm keeping my word, and thinking about it—a lot."

"Why keep me in suspense?" he asked.

Pamela frowned. "Because when I once give a promise, I stick to it," she explained.

It was true. The modern girl has many aggravating qualities, but breaking her word is not one of them. She possesses an instinctive desire to play the game; frank with her friends, she is equally frank with herself.

"Do you care for any one else?" asked Sir Felix, speaking under his breath, his eyes endeavoring to pierce the mystery that lay in hers.

"If I marry you," replied Pamela quietly, "no one else will matter."

Sir Felix sighed. "I wish I could read your mind," he said.

Pamela smiled tantalizingly. "Thank Heaven

you can't!" she whispered. "I can't even read it myself."

Once more the necessity for action took possession of her. "Let's go up-stairs and dance," she suggested. "I feel so restless. Drusilla will play for us. . . . Won't you?" she inquired, turning to Drusilla.

"If you like," replied Drusilla. Then, hesitating, "But I want a word with Adrian first."

Adrian glanced at her, wondering what it was that she was anxious to say.

"I must go in twenty minutes," announced Sir Felix, looking at his watch.

"Well," remarked Adrian, relieved, "if you're going to dance with Pam, you'll excuse me if I push off?"

"Of course," said Sir Felix.

"Oh, don't waste time talking," cried Pamela impatiently. "Come and dance! If I don't do *something*, I shall shriek!"

To avert such a catastrophe, Sir Felix accompanied her up-stairs to the large drawing-room, the polished floor of which was in itself an invitation to dance.

Pamela opened the piano. "You *are* rather an understanding person," she remarked.

CHAPTER XI

ADRIAN looked at Drusilla. He was beginning to feel like a prisoner who has carefully prepared his way of escape but is unable to carry out the scheme because of the presence of the warders. He would give Drusilla five minutes; after that, even at the risk of hurting her, he must go. The evening seemed endless. It was an eternity since he had wakened that morning to discover Vicky lighting the fire in that drab and dreary room at Parker's Court.

"You wanted to say something?" he suggested.

"It is n't easy to say," replied Drusilla nervously. She sensed his desire to go; it hurt her, bewildered her a little, made her self-conscious, irritated her into forgetting some of the things she had intended to say. The opportunity so long sought, worked up to with such courage, was slipping away from her. She felt curiously lifeless, unreal, impotent.

"I seem to have chosen an awkward moment," she continued. "You are in a hurry to go out, are n't you?"

"I don't *want* to go," replied Adrian. "But I have an appointment that I'm pledged to keep."

Drusilla bit her lip, tried hard to keep back her tears, looked up at him rather wistfully. "These constant excursions of yours away from home seem to have created a sort of invisible barrier between us," she said.

Adrian met her gaze with a touch of sternness. "Is the barrier you speak of the *result* of my wanderings, or the *cause*?"

"Adrian!" she cried, shrinking away from him, her hands instinctively covering her mouth.

"That sounds a little brutal," he added, sternly, impersonally. "I did n't mean it unkindly."

"It's true," murmured Drusilla, her voice low, vibrant, appealing. "I have n't been your wife—in anything but name—for a long time."

"Was n't that your own choice?" he asked.

Drusilla shook her head. "I did n't choose to be what I am. I was trained to be disciplined. Anything violent always shocked me. I hated myself for it, but I could n't help it. You must blame my upbringing. I was taught to despise—to shrink from any form of emotion, from anything that was n't superficial."

A clock in the hall struck the three quarters. Adrian made an instinctive movement, then paused, worried, perplexed.

Drusilla shivered. "I'm keeping you," she said, "from your appointment."

Adrian went over to her, sat on the arm of the

couch, took her hand. "Tell me," he suggested, "what was in your mind."

"I want to be your wife, Adrian," she whispered. "I want you to take me away—abroad, so that we can learn to know each other better, to—to love each other—not as friends, but as—husband and wife."

She turned her face away, her breathing rapid, her lips trembling. She had made the effort, conquered her fears, spoken the pregnant words. How would he receive them?

"Drusilla!" he muttered astonished. "Drusilla!" he cried eagerly.

She turned to him, grave, proudly humble, exquisitely sensitive. "Help me to understand my husband," she pleaded.

"Drusilla," he whispered, realizing the miracle, almost afraid to break the spell, his voice unsteady, his pulses racing, his whole mind filled for the moment with a pæan of thankfulness. She was his wife, she was a woman, she loved him; she was no longer afraid of him; no more would she shrink from him. His longing had materialized, his dreams come to fruition. They belonged to each other now—for always.

"Take me away," she cried eagerly. "Teach me."

"It's what I've always longed to do," he murmured, almost choking.

She looked up at him pleadingly. "Stay with me to-night, Adrian," she whispered. Then, seeing his look of sudden perplexity, a sense of panic flew into her mind. "Oh, you must!" she insisted. "You can't leave me now—after—after what I've told you."

"I've pledged my word," he muttered, dismayed.

It was a horrible situation for him, almost worse for her. It was humiliating; it was as though he had struck her. How could she realize the necessity for his going? It was impossible for him to explain. He was exasperated by his own impotence. He cursed himself bitterly for having yielded to the madness that had driven him into such a quandary. And Drusilla, hurt, quivering, rebellious, drew back from him, unable to realize that he meant to go notwithstanding her plea.

Emmett came in with Adrian's hat and coat, which he placed on a chair near the door.

"Your hat and coat, sir," he said. "I had to run an iron over the coat. These hotel chambermaids, sir, have n't been taught how to fold a gentleman's clothes."

"Thank you," replied Adrian.

"Shall I get you a taxi, sir?" inquired Emmett.

"Yes," said Adrian. "No! Wait a minute!"

He glanced at his watch. "I'll ring."

"Very good, sir," replied Emmett.

He left the hall and descended the stairs to the basement.

Drusilla, distressed by the interruption, almost stunned by the realization that Adrian had refused to alter his plans, withdrew into herself. Her responsiveness had vanished; bitter resentment had taken its place. Adrian, realizing this, made an effort to bridge the ever-widening gulf.

"I want you to realize," he said, "how I hate leaving you now; how deeply—how sincerely I long to stay."

"Then stay," replied Drusilla quietly.

"Would you have me break a promise?" he asked.

"No," said Drusilla. "But I don't want you to go," she pleaded.

"After to-night," he explained, "I shall be free to do whatever you *want* to do."

Drusilla shivered. "I don't want to be alone—now," she whispered.

"You're showing me a new Drusilla," he cried, puzzled for the first time by her attitude.

"Is n't that the recipe for keeping a husband's affection?" she asked with a touch of bitterness.

"Help me to win yours," he urged passionately.

"Adrian!" she murmured, trembling.

He realized that she was fighting—fighting for him—against whatever unknown influence was dragging him away from her; that the effort was exhausting her, almost paralyzing her volition. The sight

of her emotion thrilled him, hurt him, humbled him.

"Let's give up shrinking from facts," he whispered.

"I want to be all you would have me be," she said, simply, truthfully, eagerly.

"I've been difficult to live with," he muttered, "since the war. I've been nervy and irritable—uncertain—impossible."

"You have n't shown it," she protested.

Adrian laughed bitterly. "I was afraid of shocking you," he explained.

She looked at him steadily. "Could you love me as I want to be loved—*now?*" she asked.

"I love you with all the best that's in me," he cried.

Drusilla smiled. "And the worst? Don't you love me with the worst, *too?*" she said.

He nodded gravely. "With everything I am, have been, may be."

"I've been so lonely, Adrian," she added rapidly, "so terribly cut out of your life. Even with Pamela you were more natural—more yourself—than with me. . . . Oh, it's my own fault! I've kept you at a distance, closed the gate—even when I longed to break it down. . . . I want to understand life—and men, even though it hurts. . . . I want to understand *you*, Adrian; to give you all that you ask; to be necessary to you."

"You are necessary to me," he cried. "Absolutely, eternally necessary."

He made a movement to take her in his arms, but circumstances once more intervened.

Emmett, descending the stairs to the basement, had noticed that the door leading to the area was open and that a streak of light was showing under the larder door. Quietly locking and bolting the area door, he threw open the larder door, startling the occupant thereof by the suddenness of his entrance. Before the man had had time to collect his scattered wits, Emmett had swung him round, seized his arms and his collar, and had run him into the passage, from which he had propelled him vigorously up the back stairs. The noise of their coming checked Adrian's movement. He turned, questioningly, as Emmett entered the hall, pushing in front of him a thick-set, brutal, powerful-looking man, exhausted but alert, wearing clothes obviously not made for him, distinctly bewildered by the situation in which he found himself.

Emmett, the perfect butler, was panting and perspiring.

"Adrian," cried Drusilla, alarmed, shrinking back to the fireplace.

"Good Lord, Emmett!" inquired Adrian irritably. "What's all this about?"

"Excuse me, sir!" replied Emmett, endeavoring to show his usual unruffled appearance. "I found

this man in the larder; he 'd sneaked in through the area while one of the maids was posting a letter."

"How did you collar him?" asked Adrian.

"I took lessons in jiu-jitsu, sir," explained Emmett, with a modest deprecating cough, "when I was at Sir Moses Bamberger's in Park Lane."

"A pretty hefty customer," observed Adrian, running his eye over the captive.

"Shall I ring up the police station, sir?" inquired Emmett.

Adrian nodded. Then, as Emmett turned to carry out his instructions, "Wait a minute," he added, noticing the ribbons on the intruder's waistcoat. "You've been a soldier?" he asked.

The man looked at him for a moment, his little beady eyes full of suspicion; then he glanced down at the ribbons; his face became a mask; he nodded. Obviously he was a man of few words.

"The poor devil must be hungry," said Adrian sympathetically, "or he would n't have sneaked into the larder."

Drusilla frowned. Surely such sympathy was ill-timed. The man had committed a misdemeanor; he had come to steal; he deserved punishment. Society must be protected. Adrian must do his part in the protection of property. It was very sad, but what else could be done?

Emmett, too, was a little shocked at Adrian's attitude. Sir Moses Bamberger had once caught

a burglar, and the burglar had spent six months in hospital before coming up for trial. Any weakness shown toward the criminal classes by property-owners was an encouragement of "this here Bolshevism."

The subject of these speculations, though huge in size, was quick in the uptake—unlike most big men. He classified Adrian instinctively and put his protests into the right key.

"Ain't 'ad a meal since dinner-time yesterday," he muttered.

"That 's no excuse for breaking into a house," protested Adrian sternly.

The man looked at Adrian without moving. There was a tremendous sense of power in his attitude of repose, of what the theatrical producers call restrained force. "I tell you I 'm starvin'," he said.

"How dreadful!" cried Drusilla, her sympathy excited.

The man looked at her grimly. "Me stummick was 'oller, lady," he explained with that attention to detail so characteristic of his class.

Drusilla shuddered.

"It give me such a turn when I see him in our larder," interpolated Emmett, who was sighing for a small and satisfying liqueur brandy in the privacy of his pantry.

"Huh!" cried the captive of the butler's scientific grip to his still perspiring captor. "Yer did n't 'arf grip me arm. It's nearly broke."

"It would have served you right if it *had* been broken," protested Adrian.

A dangerous look crept into the stranger's eye. "I tell yer I'm desprit for want of a crust," he muttered.

Adrian, cool, imperturbable, made a striking contrast to this perfect specimen of the physical brute allied to craft and cunning. He looked slight and almost boyish; his quiet manner almost amounted to insolence. He was so completely master of himself, of the situation. Drusilla, too, showed no sign of alarm; she was too well trained. It was a case of *noblesse oblige*. Only Emmett looked perturbed. One such fracas in an evening was enough for him; he was n't as young as he used to be, and, if the feller once got free with his fists, Lord help the rest of them.

"I'll attend to this, Emmett," said Adrian.

"Thank *you*, sir," replied Emmett, greatly relieved.

Adrian turned to Drusilla. "Had n't you better——" he suggested, leaving the sentence unfinished.

Drusilla looked at him for a moment, then at the glowering captive. "All right," she agreed.

She shivered, hesitated; then, discipline asserting itself, she went out under the archway of the oak screen and up the stairs.

"You 're a dangerous fellow," said Adrian coolly. "You 'll probably get six months."

"I 'll git more than that," replied the man with a suggestion of grim facetiousness, "if yer sends for the cops."

Adrian looked up questioningly, was about to interrogate the speaker, changed his mind. "Like a drink?" he inquired.

The intruder gasped. "D' you mean it?" he asked.

"Say when," said Adrian, pouring out a liberal portion of whisky into a tumbler. Then he reached for a siphon.

"On'y a drop o' the fizzy stuff," suggested the man.

"Here you are," said Adrian, handing the glass. "Emmett!"

"Sir?" replied Emmett who was moving toward the outer hall.

"Bring some sandwiches—cut thick."

"Yes, sir," said Emmett. Then he paused. "Shall I telephone, sir?" he inquired.

"Cut the sandwiches first," replied Adrian.

"Very good, sir," said Emmett.

He retired to the pantry and obeyed his instructions.

The captive lifted his tumbler. "Good 'ealth!" he muttered.

"Cheerio," replied Adrian.

"Gawdstruth," exclaimed his unwilling guest, putting down the empty glass. "I needed that."

Adrian appreciated the fact. "Have another?" he suggested.

The man shook his head. "Not till I've 'ad somethink ter eat," he protested. Then he looked at Adrian dubiously. "Whatcher goin' ter do with me?" he asked.

"Give you some food; then send for the police," explained Adrian imperturbably.

The man frowned, made an instinctive movement, changed his mind, altered his line of action, copied Adrian's attitude of imperturbability.

"It's 'ard to be prigged fer a thing as did n't come orf," he protested.

Adrian nodded. "Been copped before?" he inquired.

"Once," replied the man after a quick, searching look at Adrian's face.

"Ah!" exclaimed Adrian coolly. "Same error of judgment?"

"No," said the man, his mask-like expression camouflaging his readiness for action.

The whisky was getting to work; he was feeling more himself; he was n't going to stand any nonsense.

"Where do you live?" inquired Adrian casually. Seated on the cushioned fender, he appeared the very incarnation of an eighteenth-century blood in twentieth-century clothes, the perfection of which roused his visitor's natural antagonism. They were totally opposite types, each with a widely different mentality, Adrian the finished product of civilization, the stranger a fit representative of the type for whom the modern economic system can find no place.

"'Ere and there," replied the man with just a touch of menace in his tone.

"Out of work?" asked Adrian.

"Yuss," said the man.

"What 's your trade?"

"Fish," said the man.

"Quite," agreed Adrian, realizing the futility of any attempt to pursue the inquiry. "Come nearer the fire."

The man moved heavily over toward the fireplace, keeping himself between Adrian and the door. As he did so, Emmett entered with a plate of sandwiches, cut thick, according to instructions.

"Put them down on the table," said Adrian.

Emmett put the plate on the table, registered his disapproval in the customary manner, and returned to his pantry, where a cigarette and a second glass of the old brandy helped to restore his nerve.

"Have something to eat?" suggested Adrian.

The man, making certain that the butler had disappeared, wolfed the sandwiches without comment. He ate rather like a dog—two twists and a turn, and a sandwich was no more.

“Been out of work long?” inquired Adrian.

The man nodded. He was too busy to speak.

“Getting the unemployment dole?”

The man paused in the process of mastication. He looked at Adrian suspiciously, then shook his head.

“What was your regiment?” asked Adrian.

The man spat out a lump of alum, that addition to the modern loaf for which the baker makes no extra charge. “Engineers,” he muttered.

“Well,” said Adrian, summing up, “those ribbons mean something, anyway. An ex-service man should n’t be allowed to starve. . . . Been out of town, have n’t you?” he added suddenly.

“Whatcher mean?” muttered the man, looking up threateningly.

“Your boots,” replied Adrian with an imperturbable smile. “Tramped quite a few miles, I should say?”

“Yuss,” said the man, licking his fingers and wiping them on his trousers.

“Cigarette?” suggested Adrian, offering the box.

The man nodded, took one, lighted it from the match held out by Adrian. There was an almost imperceptible movement at the corners of Adrian’s

mouth as he blew out the match and threw it into the fire. He had had a good look at his visitor's face; the expression on it was menacing, purposeful, revengeful. Some machinery in the man's mind had been set in motion; it would not run down, or respond to a brake, until the purpose had been accomplished.

The first whiff of tobacco was evidently grateful; the man drew it into his lungs, expelled it through his nose, grinned. "Guv'nor," he muttered. "You wos in the army yerself?" Adrian nodded. "An orficer?" Adrian nodded again. "Well. . . . If one o' yer men 'ad got 'isself inter trouble, yer would n't send 'im to a court-martial if yer could ha' 'elped it. . . . Would yer?"

Adrian shook his head.

"Well, guv'nor," continued the man. "We're both ex-service men. That's why I'm awskin' yer. It wos a error o' judgment—me walkin' inter yer larder uninvited. I admit it. . . . But don't 'ave me prigged, guv'nor, for a little thing like that. . . . Yer dunno wot it is ter be 'ungry."

He was watching Adrian as a snake watches a bird. Adrian shook off the semi-hypnotic feeling that was stealing over him.

"If I let you off this time and give you some money for a meal and a bed," he asked, "will you cut out this sort of thing?"

"Gawdstruth, sir," cried the man. "I will."

"All right," said Adrian. "I'll give you a fiver and let you go."

He wondered whether his decision was due to a sudden access of philanthropy, to a desire to avoid the bother of attendance at a police court, or to a kind of sentimental interest in the future of an ex-service man. Like most of his class, avoidance of unnecessary trouble was almost a religion. But his experience of life in the underworld had made him realize that the underdog had on the whole a pretty thin time of it. And, anyway, he hated to read of ex-service men being brought up on charges of petty theft. They had risked their lives for their country, and they deserved something better than to be driven to crime through poverty. Though it was obvious that the present victim was by no means a neophyte in his career of crime.

Adrian himself was sufficiently an individualist not to have realized that to serve his country was every man's duty and privilege; he had never faced the ethical question that a man belongs to his country quite as much as the country belongs to the man, and that to risk his life in its defense was part of the price he should pay for the privilege of being a citizen of that country. That a man should be acclaimed a hero for doing his duty was just as illogical as the fact that certain neurotic creatures should be canonized by their neurotic brothers and sisters for having conscientious objections to serving their

country. But individualism is an ineradicable trait which all the theories in the world can do nothing to alter. If the English were not individualists, they would never rest until the slums of the great cities were expunged from the map, and the owners of the property situated therein forced to feel the whips of public scorn and contempt.

"Gawd bless yer, guv'nor," muttered the stranger.

Adrian counted out nine ten-shilling notes, and added four half-crowns. "That ought to keep you for a week or two," he said, handing over the money, "while you 're finding work."

The man pocketed the cash. "And yer won't give me awye ter the police?" he asked.

"No," replied Adrian. "That 's a promise. I hate to see an ex-service man come down to this."

The man gave a sickly grin. "Will yer shake 'ands, guv'nor?" he said, holding out a hard, calloused, grimy paw.

"Good luck!" exclaimed Adrian, gripping the extended hand.

At this moment, a newspaper boy, heedless of police regulations, passed along Hill Street, crying: "Piper! Late extry! More about the escaped convict! Piper!" then his voice died away in the distance.

Adrian glanced at the man's face, the sudden look of fear on which caused him to look more closely. His own eyes dilated. It could n't be possible!

Such coincidences did n't happen outside fiction and the drama.

"Wot 's the matter?" muttered the man suspiciously.

"What were you doing in Hill Street?" asked Adrian, his manner alert, unable to keep a suggestion of excitement out of his voice.

"Passin' through," replied the man.

"Where did you get those clothes?" inquired Adrian.

"Wot?" cried the man, suddenly aware of danger.

"Did you steal them?" asked Adrian, certain in his own mind that his supposition was correct.

"Wot d' yer mean?" muttered the man drawing back, ready to swing his Herculean fists.

"*Did* you?" replied Adrian coolly.

The man changed his tone. "Guv'nor," he whispered, "yer 've give me yer word yer won't blab. A gentleman—an orficer—don't break 'is word."

"I don't break my word," replied Adrian grimly, "to an ex-service man."

The man looked up, swung round, one fist clenched.

"How did you break out of Portland?" inquired Adrian, holding the man with his eyes.

"Wot 's that?" cried the man fiercely, raising himself slightly on the balls of his feet.

Adrian gave a short laugh. "You 're Harris, the escaped convict," he exclaimed.

"Damn yer!" muttered Harris menacingly. "If yer gives me away——"

"That 'll do!" said Adrian, his coolness reacting on the other's panic.

His own brain was working alertly, rapidly; he was making up his mind regarding his course of action. "You've come pretty quickly."

"Farnd a parnd note in the pocket of these trasers," exclaimed Harris sullenly. "Come by train."

Adrian gave a shrug. "To the place where you're best known. . . . You walked into the cage? . . . Why?"

Harris hesitated. "'Ad a job ter do," he muttered.

"Why were you such a fool as to break in here?" inquired Adrian.

Harris gave a kind of grim chuckle. "Yer'll larf when I tells yer," he said. Then, his vanity functioning, "I'd planned ter rob this 'ouse before I got jugged," he explained. "Knoo it from basement ter attic. . . . When I see the back door open an' sniffed the food, it seemed like as if it wos an invitation from an old friend," he concluded grimly.

Adrian looked at him steadily. "Do you know who's up-stairs?" he inquired. "Sir Felix Sladen, the head of the C.I.D."

He moved over to the fireplace, measuring the

distance between his hand and the bell. "The game 's up, Harris!"

"You leave that bell alone," cried Harris fiercely. "D' yer hear?" he added, with a swift movement in Adrian's direction.

"Get back!" ordered Adrian sharply.

"I tell yer I 'm desprit," muttered Harris.

He looked more than desperate; he was danger personified.

"You 're a fool to come to London," said Adrian, realizing that the peril to Vicky was now acute.

"I 'm going ter do in a bloke wot robbed me of my gal," replied Harris, his voice dropping a couple of tones, his eyes fixed on Adrian, his fists ready for emergencies, "even if I 'as ter swing for it. . . . An' when I 've finished the blighter orf," he added with a touch of grim humor, "I 'll tork to 'er. . . ."

Adrian pushed the bell. "Damn yer!" cried Harris, making another swift movement in Adrian's direction. It was obvious that he meant business.

"I tell you, man, the game 's up," cried Adrian. "When I thought you were an ex-service man, I said I 'd let you go. I can't now. I won't be accessory before the fact to a murder."

"Don't you try ter stop me," muttered Harris threateningly, at the same time backing toward the archway. "I tell yer I 'm desprit. . . . I 've broke arter quod ter do in this bloke, and I 'll finish the job—in spite o' you and the 'ole bleedin' bunch o' cops."

With a sudden movement of his hand, he switched off all the lights just as Emmett entered in answer to Adrian's ring; he threw Emmett aside with a powerful jerk of his arm, and rushed off into the outer hall.

Adrian darted to the switches. "Where are you, Emmett?" he cried.

"Here, sir," muttered the breathless butler.

The front door slammed. Adrian switched on the lights. "Get me a taxi—quick," he cried.

"A taxi? Yes, sir," said Emmett, rising to his feet, and hobbling toward the front door.

Adrian seized his hat and coat, turned to go as Drusilla came down the stairs and into the hall.

"Adrian," she protested. "You're going?"

"I must," he said.

A clock chimed the three quarters.

"You risk our future by leaving me to-night," she cried. "You risk everything."

Adrian realized bitterly the truth of her remark. "My word binds me," he explained.

"Oh, Adrian!" she protested impatiently. "Don't pretend!"

"I'm hurting you," he cried. "And I can't help it."

She moved away from him. "You're shaming me a little," she replied.

"It's a matter of life and death," he said. "Ev-

ery minute makes it more urgent. My honor is concerned."

Drusilla made a helpless gesture. "Am I nothing to you?" she exclaimed.

"Everything," he protested. "Drusilla! Forgive me! Trust me! You've opened up a new world for me. After to-night, there shall be no more engagements that I can't break."

He went over to her, took her in his arms. She offered her cheek, received his kiss passively. He looked at her for a moment, then released her as Emmett appeared in the archway.

"I've got you a taxi, sir," said Emmett, whose boots were wet with snow.

Adrian hesitated for a moment. "Thank you," he replied.

Then he followed Emmett quickly to the front door and entered the taxi. "Liverpool Street," he cried.

The taxi drove off. Emmett closed the front door. Drusilla sank on the couch and covered her face with her hands.

She had failed.

CHAPTER XII

LOOKING back afterward on that night, it seemed to Adrian to have lasted through eternity. His drive in the taxi through the snow-covered streets was a nightmare. Though the change at Liverpool Street Station had been accomplished with unusual celerity, he was too strung up to realize the fact. He wanted to get back to Drusilla, but was wondering whether he would *ever* accomplish his desire. Danger seemed to threaten them on every side. Harris was free, stealthily making his way toward Vicky's abode. Sir Felix and his cordon had to be reckoned with, Vicky herself was a problem. If anything happened and exposure were the result, Drusilla would never recover from the shock. Her pride would be mortally wounded. How could he possibly explain what had driven him to take such unforgivable risks, to commit such acts of insensate folly? He was cured. The cloud that had dimmed his reasoning powers, silenced his conscience, played havoc with his philosophy, had lifted at last. He was returning to the normal. What had fascinated him now repulsed him. Others must pay for his mental aberration. He was no longer

in danger of submitting to those terrible, momentary, inexplicable surges of passion for Vicky—those crazy interludes of irresponsible callousness when nothing but his needs, his longing for response, seemed to count; when his past was blurred, his future immaterial, the present all-important. He shivered at the recollection. How treacherous to Drusilla he had been in his thoughts, in his impulses, in his actions! *Could* she understand, if it all came out? Could any carefully nurtured, decently brought-up woman of her instinctive fastidiousness possibly understand the hidden depths of a man's subconscious self?

In moments of panic, a man's egotism becomes rampant, the fact that a man is the center of his own universe is blatantly advertised. Panic paints his portrait in impressionist style, with brutal truthfulness, pitiless, terrible. Even the man of noble instincts is capable of ignoble impulses when the brake is taken off, and he clings to the steering-wheel, blindly trusting to luck to pull him through. In our contempt for his weakness, we sometimes forget to pity. . . .

Sir Felix, the conscientiously official upholder of law and order, the instrument used by society to protect itself from the underworld, made his pilgrimage to the east, determined to lay this rebel against the laws of property by the heels. His own private opinions concerning the proper treatment of

criminals were of no account when the question of performing his duty was uppermost in his mind. He was justice personified, the authorized representative of that portion of society that possessed the opportunities and the means to issue decrees and to create laws and customs. He represented property, and property ruled the civilized world. Without him and his kind, life would be chaotic. The world was for the enjoyment of the few, the privileged, the fortunate; and they would not continue to be privileged and fortunate if they were not drastic in their methods, ruthless in their punishment of offenders. It was a question of the survival of the fittest, an illustration of the biblical paradox: to those that have shall be given; to those that have not—well, what they have shall be taken away. An aphorism, spoken ironically, handed down to posterity as a just and equitable decree.

Vicky was waiting for Adrian, counting the minutes, listening to every footstep. The falling snow muffled all noise. Little blue flames burned in the fire, foretelling frost. She was in her favorite position, elbows on table, chin on hands. Waiting for what? She herself hardly knew. She only realized that she missed Jim hideously, that she wanted him to come back, that she dared not contemplate the idea of his going . . . going for good . . . never coming back. He had brought something into her life, something intangible, something won-

derful, some mystic quality that she could n't explain to herself. She gave up trying to find reasons for her need of him. She was content to bask in the satisfaction of knowing that he was necessary to her.

It was ten o'clock, and he had n't come. He had promised to return at ten. He would keep his word. She knew that. He might stay only for a few minutes; but he would come. To wait is one of the hardest things in life. Nature rebels. Youth is always impatient, anxious to be doing something. Philosophic acquiescence in delay is a sign of passing youth, of approaching age. Study a child, and you learn something of nature. Study the middle-aged, and you understand man's editing, his use of the blue pencil, his attitude of compromise, his dread of giving offense to those who may be of use to him, his studied artificiality, his pompous playing of the part assigned to him, his dislike of criticism, his dread of being "different." The boy rushes his fences; the man likes to know where he is going to land.

The possibility of a sudden intrusion on the part of Harris gave her little anxiety. If Harris had to come, he would come; no amount of thinking could alter the decrees of destiny. If Harris chose to make trouble, the trouble must be faced. Such unfortunate occurrences were by no means strange to Vicky. She had been brought up among elemental people, people who spoke what was in their minds,

who rarely paused to mince their words. If Harris were to attempt to knock her about, he would probably succeed. She could stand pain. But, if Jim were present, then there might be serious trouble. Jim was still pretty weak; Harris had the strength of a prize-fighter. Jim might be seriously disabled, perhaps killed. There had been more than one murder in Parker's Court. She longed for him to come but almost prayed that he would have gone before Harris made his appearance. It would not be in her code to give Harris away to the police; that was one of those things one did n't do. Whitechapel has its code as well as Mayfair and the wealthiest suburbs. The police were natural enemies to Vicky and her kind. If Harris knocked her about, she would give him her frank opinion regarding his conduct, but she would n't squeal. Such treachery would be anathema.

Some one was ascending the rickety stairs. As the door opened, she sprang up with a cry. "Jim!" she exclaimed.

Bill slouched into the room. "Ullo!" he muttered.

"Oh, it's you," murmured Vicky, disappointment in her voice, weariness in her attitude. "Come in and shut the door!"

Bill did as he was bidden. He had assimilated sufficient beer to make him heavy and inclined to be quarrelsome.

"What d' you want?" inquired Vicky suspiciously. Bill grinned facetiously. "Expectin' yer bloke?" he asked.

Vicky nodded.

"Oh," exclaimed Bill. "Then 'e *does* come at night?" He rubbed his chin reflectively. "Thort yer pretended 'e did n't."

"He don't," replied Vicky. "Never been here before till I had to nurse him. But he promised he 'd come to-night—ten o'clock. What time is it?"

"'Bout ten past," said Bill.

"Wonder what 's keepin' him," muttered Vicky with a shiver.

Bill chuckled and picked his teeth with a pencil. "Maybe it 's 'Erb 'Arris brikin' outer quod," he suggested.

Vicky shook her head. "That would n't keep him," she asserted.

"'Erb won't do a thing ter yer bloke if 'e ketches 'im 'ere," said Bill aggressively. "Not 'arf!"

Bill, like so many of his class, was given to repeating himself. Such repetitions got on Vicky's nerves. Bill's vocabulary was limited, more limited even than that of the majority of the English, who possess a magnificent language of which they are, as a rule, profoundly ignorant.

"Shut your head!" muttered Vicky.

"Would n't mind bettin' yer bloke does n't come,"

continued Bill, realizing the fact that he was annoying his sister, and conscientiously determined to continue doing so.

"You 'd lose your bet," replied Vicky. "He promised."

Bill was frankly puzzled. What she could see in the bloke clean beat *him*. You never could tell with girls. Had such queer fancies.

"Why d' yer want 'im ter come?" inquired Bill.

Vicky bit her lip. "I 'd feel safer like," she said, "on his account."

Bill lit a fag. "Tyke my advice," he suggested between puffs; "git 'im ter tyke yer awye somewhere till 'Erb 's sifely copped. 'Eerb 's dyngerous."

"Herb Harris has got no call to interfere with me or my friends," protested Vicky indignantly.

"Wish I knoo 'oo yer bloke wos," exclaimed Bill meditatively. "'E ain't the syne as us. 'E 's diff'rent—if yer foller me. That 's what I sye 'e is—diff'rent. 'E torks more like a torf."

"What if he does?" replied Vicky, her sense of irritation growing. "Would he be able to go where he does an' *do* as he does, if he could n't talk better 'n *we* can? Jim ain't no bicycle-snatcher; he goes for big things."

She made this assertion with a considerable suggestion of pride. Jim belonged—Vicky was sure of it—to the aristocracy of Crookdom; he was a past

master, a nob. And it was as well that Bill should realize the fact.

"Must 'ave a tidy bit o' splosh put awye somewhere," murmured Bill reflectively. "Does 'e give yer anythink?"

Vicky gave a shrug. "He wants to."

Bill stared at her in amazement. "Did n't yer tyke it?" he gasped.

"No," replied Vicky, almost inaudibly. "I could n't . . . not from *him*. 'T ain't as though I was livin' with him proper. He ain't never asked me to."

Bill pondered the problem. This peculiar *modus vivendi* was something new to him. "Wot 's 'is gyme with yer, then?" he asked.

"I dunno," said Vicky, staring into the distance.

Bill spat into the fire. "Yer dunno?" he cried impatiently, his indignation rising, his contempt for such behavior made manifest. "Well, you're a fair treat, I *must* sye. . . . Yer lets 'im muck abart! 'Ole plice thinks yer livin' with 'im! An' yer dunno wot 'is gyme is. . . . Ow, come orf it, Vicky."

Vicky looked at him, her eyes, tragic, inscrutable, steadily fixed on his. "I 'm tellin' you the truth," she said.

Bill was jiggered; he said so, anyway. He called on some invisible authority to strike him pink, but without receiving any adequate response. Such

vagaries of the female sex were enough to drive a reasonable man to drink. What was Vicky playing at? What was the bloke playing at? Had he been a student of Ibsen, he might have remarked that people did n't do such things. Had he been a regular attendant of the lighter forms of theatrical entertainment, he might have imitated the leading comedian and exclaimed: "Oh, go hon!"—a subtle form of wit invariably received by enthusiastic audiences as a priceless gem of humor. He was up against something he did n't understand, and naturally wanted to heave half a brick at it. Such desires are not always confined to the class he represented.

He wondered what Herb Harris's game was. . . . Herb had broken out of quod for some purpose. Would he have the nerve to come here and make good what he had threatened to do? Herb was capable of any form of risk in order to satisfy his passion for punishing an enemy. He'd be a pretty dangerous man to tackle; it'd take more than a couple of cops to secure him. When Herb saw red, he saw very little else. It might be as well to keep out of the way until Herb had paid his visit. Bill was n't the kind of bloke to *ask* for trouble. He was a born coward, and he knew it. If Vicky had let herself in for this sort of thing, that was her lookout. It was n't Bill's place to interfere.

"There 's some one comin' up the stairs," he muttered. He listened attentively. "No! 'T ain't 'Erb: step 's too light!"

He tiptoed over to the door, opened it an inch, heaved a sigh of relief. "Yuss! It 's yer bloke," he explained.

Vicky rose, her eyes flashing a welcome, as Adrian came into the room, garbed once more as Jim Higgins. He nodded to Bill, who was endeavoring to assume an attitude of strict neutrality and was able to achieve the dignity consistent with such a position, then turned anxiously to Vicky.

"Has he been here?" inquired Adrian. "Sorry I 'm late," he added as Vicky shook her head in answer to his inquiry.

"I don't mind nothing now you 've come," muttered Vicky with a sigh of satisfaction.

Bill grunted. "Well, I 'm orf," he exclaimed, making a movement in the direction of the door.

"Hold on a minute!" said Adrian.

An idea had occurred to him while on his way to Parker's Court, an idea that seemed to promise temporary relief from the strain of the situation—if only Vicky would agree to it. He listened for a moment at the door, then closed it, and came into the room. "I 've something to suggest," he continued. "I 've had a bit of luck—made quite a tidy sum."

"Kerntry 'ouses?" inquired Bill, interested.

"That's *my* affair," replied Adrian shortly. "Don't ask questions! Listen!"

He turned to Bill questioningly. "How much do you reckon you make a week, Bill?" he asked.

Bill meditated. What *was* the bloke's game? How much ought he to name to put himself on the right side of the fence? "Ow," he muttered, "matter of a parnd—more or less."

"Why don't you take a holiday?" inquired Adrian.

Bill stared. Was the bloke trying to be funny? Bill, having spent a considerable time in durance vile at the country's expense, was a trifle sensitive on the subject of holidays from his normal occupation. "Why don't I *what*?" he inquired.

"Take Vicky away," suggested Adrian, "to the seaside or somewhere! Stay in a boarding-house! Swank! . . . I'll stand the racket."

Bill contemplated the idea with amusement. "Lor' lumme!" he exclaimed. "Me an' Vicky in a boardin'-'ouse! What-o!"

"What d' you say?" asked Adrian, turning to Vicky.

Vicky pondered the question for a moment. "Would you come with us?" she inquired.

"Can't," replied Adrian. "I've got a job on."

"Why d' you want me to go away?" asked Vicky directly.

"Do you a bit of good," said Adrian.

Vicky's eyes flashed resentment. "You want to get rid of me," she cried.

"Talk sense," replied Adrian with the gruffness that Vicky adored. It seemed to make her so much more his. When he spoke like that, he spoke as the average husband of her acquaintance addressed the average wife.

Adrian turned to Bill. "You take her away for a week, and Harris will have skipped the country, or else he'll have been copped."

Bill whistled. "I get yer," he muttered.

But Vicky, whose instinct was greater than her powers of reasoning, shook her head. "I don't want to go away," she asserted.

"If Harris comes here and there's trouble," protested Adrian, "well, why *ask* for it?"

"Suppose he found *you*, and—and started a rough-house?" replied Vicky anxiously.

Adrian chuckled grimly. "I can keep out of his way," he said.

Bill was curious. "'Ow much 'd yer corf up?" he inquired.

"Twenty quid," replied Adrian.

"'Strewth!" cried Bill greedily. "We could do ourselves prard on twenty quid, and p'r'aps combine business with pleasure—if yer foller me."

Bill in his mind's eye beheld a long vista of empty bedrooms in which the pleasure-loving boarders had left various articles of jewelry, small change, furs,

and other pawnable flotsam and jetsam. The possibilities were entertaining.

"Stow that, Bill," exclaimed Adrian, reading the other's mind with precision. "I don't want Vicky to get into any trouble while she's away.

"I don't want to go away from *you*, Jim," murmured Vicky.

But Adrian was intent on the carrying out of his plan. Once Harris was safely reapprehended, an extension of the present plan would be possible. He wanted above all things, once the present imminent peril was passed, to give Vicky a chance to get out of her present environment, to make a fresh start, in some country where her origin would not hamper her, where, he having provided the means, she could live free of anxiety; where her personality would get a chance to develop, her nature to expand, her mind to grow. He wanted her to have a chance to be happy. He wanted her to be able to look forward unafraid.

"Suppose you agreed," continued Adrian anxiously, "you could take the midnight train to Plymouth—it gets there about seven in the morning; you could buy a couple of suit-cases and some clothes—I'll stand treat; and then you could take a cab, and drive up as though you had just arrived."

Vicky stared incredulously. "What'd they take us for at a boardin'-house?" she protested.

"Two or three guineas," replied Adrian, failing to see her point.

Bill chortled. "They 'd tyke us for war profiteers," he muttered.

Vicky was silent for a moment, then she turned to Bill with a movement of her head in the direction of the door. "Hop it, Bill!" she suggested. "I want to talk to Jim."

"Orl right!" said Bill. "Let me know if yer thinkin' of acceptin' 'is pressin' invitation. Me valet 'd want time ter pack me wardrobe. . . . An' me other shirt 's at the wash."

This effort of facetiousness carried him to the door. "Well, I 'll be 'angin' round 'ere somewhere near the King's 'Ead," he explained. "Tootaloo!"

He went out and down the stairs, forgetting to close the door.

CHAPTER XIII

ADRIAN listened to Bill's departing footsteps, then closed the door and came over to Vicky. She was gazing at him intently, a frightened look in her eyes.

"Did you mean that," she asked, "about me goin' away?"

"Yes," replied Adrian, a little disturbed by her intensity. "What's the matter?"

"Nothin'," said Vicky in a dull and toneless voice. "I don't want to go away from you; that's all."

Adrian sat down, his arms on the table. "Harris is on his way down here," he remarked.

Vicky looked up, startled. "How d' you know?" she inquired.

"I've seen him," said Adrian grimly.

Vicky stared at him. "Who told you it was Herb Harris?" she whispered.

"I tumbled to it," explained Adrian.

Vicky shivered. "If he catches you down here," she cried, "he'll know you're the fellow that's—that he threatened to do in."

Adrian nodded.

"You should n't have come," protested Vicky.

Adrian shook his head. "Could n't leave you to meet him alone."

Vicky rose and went over to the fireplace. "That's why you want me to go away?" she inquired.

Adrian nodded.

"Would I ever see you again if I did?" she asked, turning and facing him.

Adrian knew that for both their sakes it would be wiser for them never to meet again; but to express the thought in words—in the circumstances—would be both callous and cruel. Yet it would be even more cruel to allow Vicky to think that the present condition of things was to continue indefinitely. They had come to the parting of the ways; the fact must be accepted.

"Why did n't you let on to a cop that you 'd seen Herb Harris?" muttered Vicky.

"Would n't have been sporting," replied Adrian gruffly. "Bound to give him a run for his money."

Vicky smiled—a slow, fascinating smile that seemed to light up her whole countenance; it was a tribute to his sportsmanlike conduct, a confession of her love for him. "That's just like you, Jim," she said. "I suppose you can't help it."

A terrible feeling of loneliness possessed her; she was almost overwhelmed with a desire to surrender herself to him. A sense of coming disaster frightened her. She wanted to belong to him, irrevoc-

ably, finally. If their world was to end that night, she would like it to end while they were together; she would like to have given him convincing proof that for her there was no other man in the world. She was sufficiently elemental to take a pride in giving, sufficiently natural to put her thoughts into words.

"If only I belonged to you, I'd feel—oh, I dunno!—different somehow," she murmured. Then, her eyes staring into the fire, "You can stay with me to-night if you want to, Jim," she whispered.

Adrian held himself in with a tight rein. "I can't, Vicky," he replied, his voice unsteady, his hands moving nervously. "I've got to get away. And I want *you* to get away—before Harris comes."

Vicky made no movement for a moment; then she turned slowly and looked steadily into his eyes. "If you go," she said, "you won't come back. Oh, I know it—I know it, Jim! I sorter feel it inside of me. That's why," she added quietly, her voice dropping several tones, "that's why I'd like you to stay—just for once."

"I can't," replied Adrian.

Something in his tone made her look up quickly; something in his manner caused her suspicions to become active. It was not like a man to refuse what a woman offered—unless he had some very strong reason for his refusal. Adrian, realizing the dawn-

ing suspicion in her mind, started on a new tack. "I've lost my job," he explained.

"Why?" inquired Vicky. Then again suspicious, "I didn't know you *had* a job," she protested. "What *sort* of job?"

Adrian became more like Jim Higgins, gruff, laconic, an economizer of words, detached, purposeful. "Never mind that!" he muttered. "I've lost it."

"You can get another," suggested Vicky.

"Not just yet," replied Adrian slowly. "It would n't be safe."

Vicky trembled. "Then Bill was right?" she cried.

"What about?" inquired Adrian.

"When he said your line was kerntry-houses."

Adrian glanced at the door, listened, then looked up at Vicky, a grim, slightly sardonic smile on his face. "Oh, Bill said that, did he?"

"What d'you keep lookin' at the door for?" asked Vicky nervously.

Adrian wriggled. "Bit drafty," he muttered.

"Jim!" cried Vicky in a strained voice. "You ain't expectin' trouble?"

Adrian chuckled. "Not half," he said.

Vicky sat down quickly and leaned over the table. "The cops?" she whispered.

"Yes," replied Adrian, seeing a road for escape—one that Vicky would understand, a solution that

she could accept without her pride being wounded. "I've got to get away. If Harris comes and there's a row—and the police get wind of it, and I'm caught,—well! it'll put paid to *my* account."

Vicky understood. It was one of the penalties of greatness to be forced by circumstances and the exigencies of one's profession to fight a perpetual duel with the representatives of law and order. It was a sporting game, but a risky one. The police had the better cards, their quarry as a rule the greater daring. The police—like the bank at Monte Carlo—always won eventually. But the game was worth playing, though its risks were at times terrifying. If Jim were copped—no; Vicky refused to contemplate such a disaster. He must get away; he must get away quickly. She must put her own desires aside—and help him. That was the woman's part. To persuade him to stay merely because she dreaded to let him go would not be playing the game as she understood its rules.

"Where'll you go to?" she whispered.

"I dunno," said Adrian, leaning forward, his hands clasped, his eyes unconsciously following the pattern of the carpet. "A long way from here. . . . Abroad, probably."

"Take me with you, Jim," she pleaded.

There was a long, pregnant pause. Then, "I can't, Vicky," he replied.

"Why not?" she asked, rebellion in her heart,

resisting the poisonous feeling of helplessness that was creeping into her mind. "Why can't you? Do you suppose I 'd care what happened so long as I was with you?"

He glanced at the door, listened intently, then looked up at her. "It wouldn't be safe," he explained.

"For *me*?" inquired Vicky quietly, the suggestion of an inscrutable smile on her lips.

"For either of us," he replied.

Vicky drew a deep breath. What he said was alarming enough; but it was what he did n't say that made her go cold with fear, caused her heart to race, her limbs to tremble.

"Jim," she whispered almost inaudibly. "What 've you been doing?"

Adrian gave a shrug. "We won't go into that," he said.

There was another long pause; then she made a tiny, rather hopeless gesture. "You don't give yourself away much, do you, Jim?" she murmured. "You keep something back all the time. . . . Oh, I know that fellers in your line—right at the top of the tree—has to keep pretty quiet. But you could have trusted *me*, Jim," she cried reproachfully. Then, with a pathetic assumption of pride, "Not that I 'm askin' for your confidence."

She hesitated for a moment, pride and humility clinched, humility won. "You been very good to

me, Jim," she whispered. "You've treated me like—like as if I was a——"

She left the sentence unfinished. After a moment she continued speaking, quietly, unemotionally, paying a tribute to his chivalry that was as simple as it was sincere. "You could do anything you liked with me," she whispered, "and you know it. But you didn't take no advantage. . . . And, oh, Jim! I loved you for that!"

Adrian was touched, but he could ill afford the time for such personal confidences. Time was slipping away. At any moment either Harris or the police might intrude. Every unnecessary delay added an unnecessary risk. "The wisest thing," he explained, "would be for you to slip off with Bill for a week or two. I wish you would; it'd make me feel easier about you. If it's a question of cash, I can let you have more than I mentioned to Bill. Only—don't tell *him* that."

"I don't want your money if I can't have *you*," protested Vicky angrily. Then, with a suggestion of defiance—her pride up in arms, "I don't take money for nothing, Jim," she said.

"Chuck that, Vicky," exclaimed Adrian, his nerves quivering. "I can afford it," he added, wilfully misunderstanding her.

"Jim," she whispered, her tone a blend of awe, admiration, and fear, "have you been gettin' money from a bank?"

Adrian nodded. The irony of the fact that in telling her the truth he was wilfully deceiving her appealed to his sense of humor. At the same time, the fact that he *had* to deceive her irritated him exasperatingly.

"That was Herb Harris's speciality," explained Vicky. "He'll hate you all the worse for that—cuttin' into his game."

Adrian rose and walked to the window, listened, then turned, facing her. "I'll meet you at Paddington Station," he said. "You go from there to Plymouth. And I'll let you have a hundred quid."

"A hundred quid?" gasped Vicky. "You took a hundred quid from a bank?"

"Yes," replied Adrian grimly. "A bit more than that."

"It wanted some doin'," exclaimed Vicky reflectively.

"Easy as robbin' a blind beggar," replied Adrian. "I just walked into the bank, asked for it, and they handed it over."

Once more the simple tale, unadorned, sounded like one of *Othello's* reminiscences adapted to modern conditions. *Ars est celare artem.*

"Did n't you have to shoot?" inquired Vicky incredulously.

"No," said Adrian with a grin. "Shooting's a mug's game. I know a better one than that."

It is certainly easier to write a check and to cash

it over the counter than to club the cashier and rifle the safe. How true it is that the power of the truth depends upon the attitude of mind of the person who listens to it!

"D' you think they trailed you?" inquired Vicky anxiously.

"I dunno," replied Adrian. "I dunno. That's why I've got to get away to-night."

Something in his tone startled her. "Jim!" she cried in a sudden access of panic. "Does that mean you won't never come back?"

Adrian lit a cigarette with a shaky hand. "I dunno, Vicky," he muttered.

Vicky looked at him; her limbs seemed inert, her volition drugged. With an effort, she recovered herself, rose, went over to the fireplace, gazed intently into the fire, shivered, then suddenly turned and faced him. She was striving to subdue her emotion, biting her lip to keep back her tears; but in spite of her efforts, her voice trembled, her lips quivered, her eyes filled. "If you didn't come back," she whispered, "I think I'd die."

"That'll do, Vicky!" exclaimed Adrian roughly. He realized that one word of sympathy, any suggestion of response, would instantly have produced a flood of tears. The scene was painful, harrowing to the feelings; he was reproaching himself bitterly. He longed to get it over. For her sake as well as for his own, he must be adamant. It needed a

colossal effort of will not to comfort her. He called himself a cad and a brute. He despised himself utterly.

"If I 'd done the dirty on you, it 'd be different," he explained, using the vernacular of the district. "But I always knew the day might come when I 'd have to do a bunk."

Vicky, being a woman, was unable to visualize his point of view. A woman would rather have the satisfaction of regretting a catastrophe, of experiencing the sorrow it entails, than have the sorrow without the experience of what must inevitably lead to catastrophe.

"So you kept me out of your life—the real part of you, Jim," she protested, her tragic eyes veiled, her whole attitude expressive of a fallen house of cards. "I understand. But you don't know how I love you. How could you?" she concluded, with a pitifully hopeless gesture.

"That 's all right, Vicky," said Adrian sympathetically. "You 've been a good pal to me."

"I 'd die for you, I would," she muttered. "I 'd die for you." Then she made a heroic effort to pull herself together. "But 't ain't much use talkin'! We got to plan how you 're to get away."

Adrian looked up. "I 've a plan at the back of my head," he explained.

He rose, went over to the door, opened it a crack, listened, closed it, went over to the window,

listened, then returned to the table. "Supposing you could get away," he continued, "away from all this—to a place where you could start fresh——"

Vicky frowned. "D' you mean," she asked, "to better myself?"

"Yes," replied Adrian eagerly, "to better yourself professionally. You're all right—in yourself. I'd risk a lot," he added, "to give you a real chance."

"Oh, I'm not in your class, Jim," she protested with a touch of bitterness. "*I* could n't rob banks; I've not got the nerve—or the brains. *I* could n't go into smart shops and sneak things, or stay in big hotels an' get other folks' jewels. You got to stick to your trade if you're born to it."

Her philosophy interested Adrian; she was unable to visualize any other profession than that to which she had been apprenticed since her birth. Robbery was almost universally practised as a trade, but there were degrees—higher spheres—altitudes in which it became a respected means of livelihood. Half the world robbed the other half, lived on it, battenèd on it, and prospered. Life was one long duel between the elect and the damned. The successful rogue went to the House of Lords; the petty thief spent his time in accumulating a long record of convictions to which the magistrate or judge referred with unbecoming candor. In time, a man's record became stamped on his countenance;

he could n't escape from it. The successful rogue, dressed for the part, could himself become a magistrate and give the signal, "Thumbs down," when a smaller operator appeared before him for judgment. His fur coat, patent-leather boots, and silk hat were his passport. The seedy person without a collar had no such disguise. Life was very unfair. In trade, in business, in politics, the more ruthless a man was, the higher he climbed; the more he played for his own hand, the more certain he was to achieve success.

"You can't catch on to my meaning," said Adrian. "What I meant was this. Supposing you could get away—to South Africa, Canada, Australia—somewhere a long way off, and start again—differently—with different surroundings? Or there's the West Indies—Jamaica: with a bit of money, and a bit of land, there's a lot to be done. You'd soon pick up the fruit business, for instance."

He was about to enlarge on the advantages of fruit-farming in Jamaica, when Vicky interrupted him with a direct question. "Are *you* goin' to Jamaica, Jim?" she inquired.

Adrian shook his head. "Nothing in my line there," he explained.

"What'd I do in a place like Jamaica—alone?" she cried.

"I'd see that you had enough cash to buy some land, and I'd keep you supplied with what was

necessary—till you found you were supporting yourself. I'd see to all that," replied Adrian.

"And I would n't know whether you'd got copped or not," she muttered.

"It's a great life in the West Indies," continued Adrian. "A great climate. People all right, too. I've heard folks say that it makes the weald of Sussex look like Hackney Marshes. Sun shining every day, moon shining every night; fair treat of a country. Bananas everywhere, oranges, grapefruit; sugar, too, and tobacco. No fogs, no snow, no snakes. None of *this*. . . . Why, in a year or two, you'd have forgotten what the Commercial Road was like."

"Would I?" murmured Vicky unconvinced. "And where'd you be, Jim?" she asked.

"I dunno," replied Adrian. "I'd write to you—sometimes, and tell you."

Vicky looked at him, frightened. "Write to me?" she echoed, quivering all over. "That means I'd never see you again?"

Adrian took the bull by the horns. "We've come to an end of all this, Vicky," he said.

"D'you think I could live without seein' you, Jim?" asked Vicky, her voice lifeless, her eyes fixed.

"I tell you, you'd get used to it," replied Adrian, "in a place like that."

"Would I?" replied Vicky with unusual bitterness. "Why? I ain't a *man*!"

Adrian looked up. "What d' you mean?" he asked.

"I don't forget so easy," muttered Vicky.

"Oh, I dunno," replied Adrian reflectively. "When you get away from here, and you can see the sky and the sunlight, and there's no one to point at you and call you names, it'll help a lot."

"Oh, I hate you when you talk so cool about never seein' me again," cried Vicky passionately. "I don't mean nothin' to you. I suppose it's in the way of things. You ain't the same as *me*. You ain't in my class; that is, I ain't in yours. You're a cut above me—robbin' banks an' forgin'. . . . How could I live honest? I ain't never been taught to be honest. How could I learn a trade? D' you suppose I'd care what happened—if I was over there—thousands of miles away, and you——"

She broke off with a shrug. She was a little ashamed of herself for her outburst. "A man's different," she continued. "His job always comes first. But that don't make no difference to my lovin' you. It don't make no difference to what I'd feel if I didn't never see you again."

She went over to the window, making a great effort to control her passionate resentment of his attitude.

"Don't show yourself at that window," Adrian exclaimed. "Pull down the blind."

"Why?" she inquired, turning and facing him.

Adrian explained that Harris might show up at any moment. Vicky nodded, then slowly pulled down the blind, and came back to him. "If I say I'll go, Jim, will you promise to keep out of Herb Harris's way?" she asked.

"Yes," said Adrian. "He's coming here to do me in. Well, I don't want to be done in. And I don't want a row."

"Where did you see him, Jim?" she inquired. "Up west," replied Adrian, "making his way towards the Strand."

Vicky pondered. "He's got it comin' to him if he shows up here," she remarked.

Adrian nodded. "If I guess right," he said, "he won't show up before midnight. He'll want money to get away with—after he's done me in, too. He'll have a lot of little things to think about before he comes along and makes himself pleasant. Well! Don't you see? By midnight you can be on your way to Plymouth, and I can be——"

"Where?" interrupted Vicky quietly.

"Where I'm unlikely to be looked for," explained Adrian coolly. "I tell you we've *got* to get away," he added emphatically, "and we mustn't be seen going together. This part's humming with plain-clothes detectives. If Harris comes here, and they find *me*——"

He paused to light another cigarette, glanced at

Vicky inquiringly. "You see, don't you?" he asked.

Vicky made a gesture of hopeless surrender. "Right-o!" she muttered. "You better do a bunk."

"I've got to," replied Adrian promptly. "And so have you."

"Herb Harris can't do nothin' to *me*," asserted Vicky.

"I'm not taking any risks," said Adrian. "Now then! What about Bill? Will you take him with you, or would you rather go alone?"

There was a slight pause. Adrian did not see the inscrutable look on Vicky's face, which was turned away from him. Her eyes were fixed, resolute, her mouth set, her whole manner submissive—whether to Adrian or to destiny, it would be difficult to judge.

"No good takin' Bill," she muttered curtly.

"That's right!" exclaimed Adrian, relieved. "I'll meet you at Paddington at a quarter to twelve—with the money."

Vicky looked at him curiously. "Where are you goin' to get it from?" she inquired.

"That's *my* troubles," said Adrian.

"Wonder how Herb Harris managed to break out of quod," pondered Vicky.

"He isn't the first that's done it," explained Adrian. "What price that chap in the Isle of Wight?"

A man had recently broken out of Parkhurst Prison, remaining at large for several days—greatly to the satisfaction of the newspaper reporters. Harris might do the same. London was the safest place in Europe in which to hide.

Adrian explained the procedure he wished Vicky to follow. She was to go to Plymouth by the midnight train, purchase some clothes—ready-made clothes were not only well cut and attractive but camouflaged the origin of many of the wearers—then, with a trunk and a suit-case to vouch for her respectability, she was to book a room in a large hotel—the larger the hotel, the easier it would be to escape observation; having done this, she was to deposit her money in a bank—the manager of the hotel would introduce her as a customer—and then request the bank manager to procure her a passport. These things could be wangled. Adrian was a little vague on the subject, but realized that there was very little that couldn't be done by wangling—if the wangler possessed money. He himself would send her some more money, to reach her on Monday—by registered post. Having secured her passport, all she had to do was to withdraw her balance, buy a ticket for Jamaica, and take the first boat.

It sounded simple; but, unfortunately, Adrian didn't realize that the boats for the West Indies sailed as a rule from Southampton. Neither was

Vicky acquainted with this fact. But his manner was convincing, and a convincing manner is peculiarly reassuring.

"You seem to know all about it, Jim," said Vicky.

"I've been making inquiries," explained Adrian.

"Have you got to get a passport when you want to go away from England?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Adrian. "*I've* got one."

"How did you get it?" she inquired. "Where are you goin' to, Jim?"

Adrian hesitated. "I dunno—yet," he replied. "But if there was a row—through meeting Harris—and they recognized my photograph—well! I should be in the soup."

Vicky frowned. She saw more than Adrian had intended her to see. "You've been plannin' all this," she muttered, "and you never said a word to me all the time. You don't love me, Jim: not as I love *you*."

"Come off it, Vicky!" he protested. "We're in the cart, and we've got to get out of it."

"It's true," continued Vicky, heedless of his interruption. "I've been wonderin' some time; and now I *know*. If you'd loved me, you wouldn't have been satisfied with what you've got from me. You'd have wanted . . . everything, knowin' as it was yours for the askin'. . . . You don't want me, Jim; you never did. And now you want to get rid of me. I'm a hindrance to you in your trade. Oh,

Gawd!" she cried desperately—a tragic cry that hurt Adrian terribly. "An' I—love you so!"

"That 's all right, Vicky," he said, trying hard to control his voice.

"Oh, Jim! Jim!" she cried. "I seen it comin'! I seen you thinkin' more and more of your jobs, an' less of *me*. . . . Oh, I don't say you have n't been kind. You been kind enough; but that ain't all. You 're tired of me. I can see it. I can feel it. And—and I can't bear to let you go."

With an instinctive movement, a desperate attempt to hold him, she threw her arms round him, her hands clutching at his clothes, her body shaken with sobs. He soothed her gently.

"Jim," she whispered, her breath coming quickly, her voice quivering, "you can have me now—if you want to. . . . Just to show you how much I love you. . . . I'm pretty, ain't I? Don'tcher want me, Jim? Don'tcher want me?"

Adrian held her in his arms, pitying her, feeling desperate, helpless, impotent. He was paying for his madness—paying with interest. She had offered herself to him, and he could n't accept the gift. She was exhibiting her naked soul—pitifully, almost ruthlessly, intent on giving, offering all that was in her power to give in order to keep him with her. She was trembling like a frightened child, responding to the sympathy in his voice by little gasps that were half sighs, half sobs, glorying in

the strength of his arms, lost to realities. She was in his arms; her head was on his shoulder; her hair brushed his cheeks; she could feel his heart beating. Chivalry was having a hard fight to hold him to his decision. Her surrender was so complete that it was horrible to refuse. She was so soft, so tender, so yielding. He became almost physically weak. . . . The thought of Drusilla waiting for him, trusting him, seemed to grow dim. His mind became chaotic, a blur, a useless flabby thing of no account. The climax had arrived, and he was n't ready to face it.

They were each unconscious of the flying moments, each inattentive to the distant roar of the world without; neither heard the sound of heavy footsteps on the stairs. Adrian, his back to the door, his cheek resting on Vicky's glorious mop of red-gold hair, could only hear the beating of her heart. Vicky, her face half hidden in his coat, could only wonder at the surge of passion that she had so suddenly aroused. Could it be true that he loved her? Could it be true that he wanted her? She clung to him, pressed herself closer to him, quivering, half unconscious.

The door opened slowly, softly, cautiously, and Harris sidled in, quietly closing the door. Having locked it, he pocketed the key. Then he stood watching them, his eyes gleaming, his mouth working, holding himself in, intent on making the most

of every issue of the situation with which he was so suddenly confronted.

"Oh, Jim!" murmured Vicky, her voice rich, low, unsteady, her face transformed by the passionate expression she was giving to her love for him. "I can't let you go! I can't! I never cared for no one in the world but you."

He held her tightly, but made no other response. He was still calling on his reserves of strength. Sensing his attitude, she looked up, trying to control her tears, and saw Harris, standing there grimly watching them, his little red eyes blinking furiously, his great rough hands clenching and unclenching. She gazed at him for a moment, fascinated, unable to move.

Adrian, seeing her expression, was puzzled. Then he slowly looked round and saw Harris. The three of them might have been standing for *tableaux vivants*, so little movement there was.

After what seemed like an interminable interval Adrian released Vicky and turned, facing Harris.

"Hallo, mate!" he said. "Come to the wrong house, have n't you?"

Harris cleared his throat noisily, and made a step forward.

CHAPTER XIV

LIKE a commander-in-chief facing an unexpected break through, Adrian had instantly to scrap his plans and create a fresh set. Harris had arrived; he was dangerous; he evidently meant mischief. At any moment the police might intervene. In which case publicity would follow. Publicity would not only shatter Adrian's life but Drusilla's happiness as well. The situation was fairly desperate. He must defend Vicky, get her away, elude the police, and escape from Harris's company. This would require considerable ingenuity on his part, and a certain amount of luck.

With the need for action, and in the presence of danger, Adrian's weakness vanished. Work or any form of mental activity is an admirable antidote to sexual susceptibility.

Harris did not need to make any fresh plans; things were coming out just as he had planned them. He was a man of one idea at a time; and his present intention was to do in the bloke who had butted in where he was n't wanted, and afterward to make it hot for the girl in question. Having accomplished

this, leaving Vicky with a couple of black eyes and perhaps a dozen or more painful bruises and some disfiguring weals—a chair-leg would be an admirable vehicle for punishment—Harris would then face the problem of getting away from the police. But one thing at a time was his motto, and he intended to secure all possible enjoyment from the admirably arranged situation. Like a playful tigress, he was ready to play with his victims before annihilating them. He had taken just enough whisky at a railway refreshment-room to prime him nicely for the job.

"Gotcher at lawst, 'ave I?" he murmured. "It 's like a dream comin' true."

"What d' you want?" inquired Adrian roughly.

Harris chuckled grimly. "You an' me got ter 'ave a few words," he explained.

"What d' you want to come here for?" asked Vicky.

"Never you mind!" retorted Harris amiably. His amiability was that of a disgruntled elephant.

"Spit it out, mate," suggested Adrian, lighting a cigarette, and seating himself between Vicky and the intruder.

"I 'll take me time," replied Harris. "I bin walkin' since afternoon. 'Ad nothink ter eat—'cept a couple of drinks and a sandwich some blasted torf give me up west."

He contemplated Adrian's physiognomy with

some interest, though scarcely in a complimentary spirit. "Bit your style, 'e was; only better lookin'!" remarked Harris. Then he surveyed the room with a grin of appreciation; there was an air about it that Portland seemed unable to imitate. "Well!" he exclaimed. "Mykes yerselves pretty comferble 'ere, don'tcher? Cawpet on the floor, picktchers on the walls! Nice and 'omy, eh?" Then, with a sudden access of fury, "But yer took my gal," he cried, leaning forward rather in the attitude of a pugilist. "Yer took my gal," he repeated fiercely.

"I was n't never your gal, Herb Harris," protested Vicky; "though yer wanted me to be."

"Yer would 'ave bin," retorted Harris grimly, "if 'e 'ad n't come buttin' in."

He turned to Adrian, still blinking his little ferrety eyes—though they were becoming more accustomed to the light. "You an' me 've got ter 'ave a few words," he repeated.

Adrian had a sudden inspiration; if he could succeed in getting Harris well under the influence of drink, some means of escape might be found.

"Got any booze in the cupboard?" he asked Vicky.

"Bottle o' whisky," replied Vicky. "Bill sneaked it from a barrow."

"Fetch it out," said Adrian.

Vicky produced a bottle of whisky, to the contents of which Bill had already paid tribute; she then

fetches three heavy tumblers, which had obviously been appropriated from a bar; after which she filled a jug with water from a tap over the sink and placed it alongside the glasses and the bottle. While she was doing this no word was spoken. Both Adrian and Harris were keenly alert, ready for instantaneous action should it be necessary. Harris remained with his back to the door; Adrian kept his face as much as possible in the shadow. One cheap candle makes a poor effort to illuminate a room.

"Help yourself!" suggested Adrian, having poured some whisky into a tumbler, to which he added a little water.

Harris moved cautiously toward the table, poured himself out half a tumbler of whisky, omitting to add any water.

"D'yer mean ter sye," he inquired, "yer did n't know wot was 'ere?"

"That 's what I mean," replied Adrian coolly.

"Stow that," cried Harris, showing his teeth.

"It 's true," said Vicky.

"Stow it!" repeated Harris viciously.

He nodded to Adrian. "Good 'ealth!" he muttered, observing the ritual mechanically.

"Cheer-o!" replied Adrian.

They drank, each watching the other. Harris coughed as the fumes of the raw spirit entered his lungs. "Yuss! Yer do yerselves pretty well

up 'ere," he continued, once more half filling his tumbler. "I ain't robbin' yer," he explained. "Yer won't 'ave no use for booze when I 've finished with yer."

He drank the second dose and smacked his lips.

"Shut your head, Herb Harris!" protested Vicky angrily. "I was n't never your gal."

Harris ignored her intervention. He looked at Adrian morosely. "Wot for did yer go an' tyke 'er awye from me?" he inquired.

Adrian removed the cigarette from his mouth. "Did n't you hear Vicky tell you to shut your head?" he asked.

"Yuss," replied Harris dangerously. "I 'eard!"

"Well!" inquired Adrian. "Why don't you?"

Harris shifted his position. "Come orf of it, mate!" he muttered. "You an' me 've got ter 'ave a few words."

"You 've got no call to argufy about *me*," exclaimed Vicky.

"Ain't I?" said Harris, helping himself to a further supply of whisky.

Vicky faced him defiantly. "I 've never been *his* gal," she asserted, "any more than I was *yours*."

"Don'tcher love 'im?" inquired Harris fiercely.

Vicky made a desperate effort for Adrian's sake, though the lie hurt her—hurt her terribly. "No," she cried.

Harris grinned. "Women was always champion

liars," he remarked. "Look 'ere!" he cried, his manner becoming more aggressive as the whisky began to do its work. "Folks up above is aht, folks down below is drunk. There ain't no one 'ere. . . . I don't care if I swing for it, mate," he continued fiercely, "but I 'm goin' ter do yer in."

He drained his tumbler, his eyes fixed on Adrian, who coolly flicked the ash from his cigarette on the floor and chuckled incredulously. "Heard that talk before," he said.

"Yer won't 'ear it agine," muttered Harris, whose facility for repartee was scarcely remarkable.

"You 've got no call to threaten Jim," interposed Vicky, whose knowledge of Harris's type made her anxious. One blow from that massive fist, and Adrian would be on the floor with Harris on top of him, raining deadly blows on the prostrate form of the man she loved.

"If 'e ain't yer feller," inquired Harris with semi-drunken gravity, "why d' yer butt in?"

Adrian shifted his chair so that he faced Harris.

"Steady with the booze, mate," he suggested.

Harris gave a deep sigh. "I feel like as if I can't git enough," he asserted. "It 's warmin' me blood."

He made a sudden movement toward Vicky, his head thrust forward, his fists clenched. "Yer thort I was sifely put awye fer another six years, did n't yer?" he cried. "Yer thort yer could carry on with 'im orl right an' no one ter interfere."

"*You've* got no call to interfere," replied Vicky proudly.

"Whatcher let 'im rob me for?" snarled Harris, forcing her back toward the wall. Then he turned quickly, letting her go as Adrian made a quick movement toward him.

The two men faced each other, Harris breathing hard, Adrian alert, watchful, cool. "D'yer think I broke outer quod an' risked gittin' shot ter come 'ere an' tork pretty?" inquired Harris.

"That 'll do, Harris," replied Adrian, speaking as an officer to a rebellious private. He took this risk, acting on the assumption that, in a crisis, authority told. It checked Harris, but stimulated his suspicions.

"'Oo are yer, blast yer!' muttered Harris, putting his face almost close to Adrian's. "'Oo are yer, I'd like ter know? . . . Yer don't belong darn 'ere. What for did yer come robbin' me of my gal?"

Adrian gave a fairly good imitation of the face-tiousness so frequently exhibited by the inhabitants of that district. "You're a pretty sort of fancy bloke for a girl to be proud of," he exclaimed. "I *don't* think. . . . Why, I could make a better-looking cove than you out of sawdust and a tin can. . . . Take another drink, and then go and look at yourself in the glass; it 'll calm you down a bit."

He turned to get the bottle. Harris, with a quick movement, grasped his neck, nearly pulling him over. Adrian freed his neck from the throttling pressure and braced himself for the struggle. They swayed, twisted, both breathing hard. The struggle became more ruthless, deadly, menacing. Step by step they achieved the space between the window and the table. Vicky crept quietly toward them, ready to intervene at the first opportunity. Adrian felt his strength ebbing; his bones felt suddenly brittle, his muscles flabby. The strength of Harris was terrific. Science was of no avail. It was like being in the grip of a gorilla.

Harris made a movement to reach his knife—a recently purchased weapon—that lay in his hip-pocket. Adrian made a lunge, and the knife fell on the floor. With one hand on Adrian's throat, Harris released the pressure exerted by the other and made a snatch to secure the knife. But Vicky saw her chance and took it. With a quick, lithe movement, she bent down, grasped the knife by its handle, and stepped back out of the reach of Harris's twitching hand. Harris, robbed of his weapon, gave a bull-like roar and threw himself with savage vigor on Adrian, both hands grasping his opponent's throat, forcing him backward toward the table, pressing his neck back—steadily, ruthlessly, grimly—until Adrian felt certain that his neck would break. He was choking; his tongue

seemed to be swelling; he could n't breathe; his eyes . . . With a desperate effort, he tried to elude Harris's grasp. Harris bent him backward over the table, using his weight. A muffled cry escaped Adrian's lips. Vicky screamed.

"Let go, Herb Harris! Let go!" she cried. "you 're killing him!"

"That 's wot I 'm 'ere for," snarled Harris, exerting still more pressure, his thumbs working like piston-rods.

"Let go!" repeated Vicky, almost frantic. "Let go!"

Harris, using his huge chest to force Adrian back upon the table, met his victim's startled and scarcely conscious gaze. Adrian, seeing the dawning recognition on Harris's face, made a great effort to avert exposure. As Harris muttered, "Why, you 're the cove what——" Adrian's hand flew up, covering the speaker's mouth. Harris gave a sudden lurch, lost his balance, fell on the table on top of Adrian. Adrian groaned. Harris drew back his clenched fist, prepared to send it at full force into his victim's face. Vicky screamed; then, scarcely knowing what she was doing, she threw herself on Harris, plunging the knife beneath his left shoulder-blade. His fingers relaxed; he coughed, then fell backward on the floor between the table and the bed. There was a convulsive movement of his limbs; his subconscious self seemed to be prompting his body to make a

final effort to finish off the job. But the limbs relaxed. He lay motionless.

Vicky was too much concerned about Adrian to notice what had happened to Harris. "Oh, Jim!" she cried. "Has he killed you?"

Adrian slipped into a chair, feeling as though every bone were broken, every muscle torn out. He swallowed once or twice, felt his throat, recovered his breath to some extent, squeezed Vicky's hand to reassure her, looked at Harris, knelt down, then, after a short pause, rose, looked at Vicky—who was cowering near the window, her teeth chattering, her eyes full of terror. When he spoke, his voice was husky, feeble; it was like the voice of a man who had been speaking for eight or ten hours. His face was white and drawn. The old truism was receiving a practical illustration: every action of the individual is pregnant with consequences for others. For Vicky's sake, he smothered his horror and tried to speak casually.

"No," he remarked; "but it looks as though you had killed *him*."

Vicky, who had advanced a few steps, recoiled with a muttered cry of terror, her face white, her limbs trembling, her hand covering her mouth. Adrian knelt down and examined the prostrate body. Then he rose and faced her grimly.

"His number's up," muttered Adrian.

They looked at one another, half hypnotized.

The silence was almost insupportable. Adrian shivered. "This is a bit of all right," he said.

The thing was done; nothing could undo it. It was time for action. "What'll we do?" asked Vicky hoarsely.

Adrian thought rapidly. "Any one about?" he inquired.

Vicky moved quietly over to the door. "It's locked," she whispered. "He took the key."

"Good Lord!" cried Adrian shuddering. "I hate to touch him."

With an effort of will, he forced himself to kneel down once more and to feel in Harris's pocket for the key. Having secured it, he dropped it on the table with a shudder.

"I ain't never killed no one before," whimpered Vicky.

"Here," muttered Adrian authoritatively. "Take a drop of whisky. . . . I could do with some myself."

Vicky grasped the bottle, poured out some whisky shakily. Adrian, his hand trembling, pointed at the glass, revolted.

"That's his glass," he cried.

Vicky shuddered, then poured some whisky into the other two glasses. They drank it gratefully. The glass dropped from Adrian's hand.

"Oh, Gawd!" cried Vicky with a start. "What's that?"

"It slipped," explained Adrian.

He pulled himself together, tried to focus his thoughts on the immediate future. "We've got to get away," he muttered, quickly.

"And leave him there?" asked Vicky, her voice almost inaudible.

"He's safer here," said Adrian. "We can lock the door from the outside."

"Oh, Jim!" she cried. "It's reelly the end—now."

"I'll get you out of it," he asserted.

"I did n't go for to do it," she wailed. "He was killin' you, Jim."

Adrian nodded. "You saved my life," he muttered. "He'd pretty well done me in—as he *said* he would."

Unconsciously, he wiped his hands on his handkerchief; then, noticing what he had done, quickly threw it into the fire. He was feeling rather sick. He wanted air; he wanted to get away—to leave this scene of horror, to wake up in the sunshine, to forget this interminable nightmare.

Vicky was seated on a chair, rocking herself, whimpering, great shuddering sobs shaking her. "What'll we do?" she wailed. "What'll we do?"

"Steady, Vicky!" he said. "We've got to keep our heads."

With a shaky hand, he lighted a cigarette.

"We've got to think of *you*. . . . Me, too. . . . Everybody," he added, his thoughts flying to Drussilla, the horror of exposure in his face. "We've got to get out of this."

Vicky was staring at the carpet, her eyes fixed on a spot just underneath the table. "Look, Jim!" she cried with a shudder. "Under the table. . . . A trickle. . . . Like red ink, spilt."

She covered her face with her hands.

"Put on your hat," said Adrian, moving toward the door.

Vicky rose hurriedly, muffling a cry of protest. "Don't leave me alone," she wailed, "with *him*."

"I'm not going to," replied Adrian. "Listen! You've got to do a bunk—quick!" He took a cheap note-case from his pocket. "Take this! There are some pound notes in it. I'll meet you at Paddington—departure platform—at half-past eleven."

Vicky, pulling on her hat, looked up suspiciously. "Why can't you come with me?" she asked.

"Wouldn't be safe," replied Adrian. "We mustn't be seen together—down here. Take the notes!"

He handed the case to her. "There ought to be three or four pounds," he added.

He went to the door, opened it, listened outside on the landing. Vicky opened the note-case, took

out the notes, counted them. As she did this, a small piece of printed paper fell on the floor. "Four pound ten," said Vicky.

Then she noticed the fallen scrap of paper, picked it up, examined it in the light of the candle. It was a cloak-room receipt from Liverpool Street Station. She looked at Adrian, puzzled. Then she stuffed it into the note-case with the treasury notes and placed the case inside her dress.

"I'm to meet you," she murmured slowly, "at Liverpool Street?"

"Liverpool Street?" said Adrian, returning into the room. "No. I said Paddington."

Vicky nodded. "Eleven thirty, Paddington," she repeated.

"Yes," replied Adrian. "I'll follow you directly. I'll give you five minutes start. You'd better take the underground to Praed Street. Stay in the waiting-room until I come."

He opened the window. The measured tramp of feet, heavy boots, walking in step, could be heard approaching. Vicky muffled a cry. "What's that?" she gasped.

"A police patrol," explained Adrian.

He listened intently. The noise died away. He heaved a sigh of relief. "They've passed," he whispered. "Now go!"

Vicky looked at him as though she were trying

to read what lay at the back of his mind. "Jim," she murmured, "I wouldn't care what happened if—if I was n't never goin' to see you again."

"I'll be at Paddington at half-past eleven for certain," replied Adrian soothingly.

Vicky sighed. "Right-o!" she whispered.

It seemed to her that some one was whispering in her ear: "This is good-by! You'll never see him again. He won't meet you at Paddington. Once you go from here, you go out of his life for good!" She made a great effort to combat the thought. She realized that she was in great danger; but somehow that did n't seem to matter. What did anything matter if Jim was going away from her?

She glanced at Harris, shuddered, looked at Adrian, pleadingly, longingly, pitifully; then, with a characteristic shrug, she went over to the door.

She was about to open it when she heard the sound of footsteps ascending the stairs. She drew back, terrified; her eyes sought Adrian's. She remained motionless.

He signaled to her to be silent. They listened intently. The footsteps paused outside the door. Then came a sharp knock.

"Slip out when the door opens," whispered Adrian.

He moved to the table and blew out the candle.

Vicky remained stationary by the door; it would open against her. She held her breath, waited what seemed like hours.

The door opened. There was a moment's pause; then a figure stepped into the room, hesitated for a moment, then sniffed—evidently having noticed the smell from the cheap candle that had just been extinguished. Suddenly an electric torch was switched on. The light from it played on the fireplace. Here was Vicky's opportunity. She slipped through the doorway and down the stairs. One of the stairs creaked.

Instantly the torch was focused on the doorway, remained for a moment, then it circled the room, slowly, methodically, at about the level of an ordinary man's chest. As it played on the opposite side of the room, Adrian slipped quietly toward the door. Then he pulled a pipe from his pocket, and, to give Vicky time to get away, he pointed it at the man behind the torch, and called: "Hands up, Harris! Or I shoot!"

"Who's that?" cried the owner of the torch, turning rapidly, the torch in his hand; it remained focused on Adrian, who was standing in the doorway, the pipe in his hand in imitation of a revolver. There was a pregnant pause. Then, "Adrian!" exclaimed Sir Felix Sladen.

That Sladen should come alone to such a place seemed to Adrian almost incredible. The man

must be either completely callous regarding his own safety, or else—what? Did he suspect? Had he some inkling of the truth? Whatever the explanation, the situation was desperate.

Actually, Sir Felix, from his knowledge of the particular criminal concerned, had timed his trap to function at what seemed to him the obvious hour, and, like a good general, was inspecting the *locale* to make sure that everything was in order. That Destiny should so deal the cards as to involve Adrian in the game was one of those ironic strokes of fortune, or fate, or luck, for which the dwellers in Olympus have such a *flair*.

The shock of discovering Adrian was almost as staggering to Sir Felix as the fact of being discovered was to Adrian.

Each stared at the other questioningly.

"Good Lord, Felix!" protested Adrian with a gasp. "I—I thought you were Harris. . . . Have you got him yet?"

"No," replied Sir Felix, keeping the light fixed on Adrian's face. "What are you doing here?"

Adrian, who was acting for all he was worth, gave a somewhat rueful laugh—the laugh of a man who was scared but was averse from showing it. "Trying to score off Scotland Yard," he explained.

If Felix would only take the bait, Vicky would have time to reach the underground station. He must play for time, use every artifice, play the fool,

lose his reputation for sanity, do anything to keep Felix occupied.

Sir Felix smiled grimly. "Take my advice," he said, "and go home."

"Without seeing him arrested?" protested Adrian.

Felix frowned; his experience had taught him to be suspicious of every one and everything. On the other hand, Adrian—in his opinion—was quite capable of this ridiculous behavior. Felix had little admiration for the man of leisure who was content to remain one. "How the devil did you find out where Harris lived?" he inquired.

Adrian laughed. The effort cost him a certain amount of self-control. The laugh was slightly hysterical. Sir Felix recognized it as that of a frightened man. "That's telling," protested Adrian.

Sir Felix lost his patience. "Good God, Adrian!" he cried. "This is n't a rag!"

"It's damn fine sport, man-hunting," replied Adrian with the callousness of one whose recreation consisted of taking life.

"How long have you been here?" asked Sir Felix.

"A couple of minutes," said Adrian. (Vicky would by now be almost at the station. He must give her time to take her ticket and perhaps wait for a train.)

"In the dark?" inquired Sir Felix.

"Yes," said Adrian defiantly. "In the dark."

Sir Felix chuckled, a little contemptuously. "If Harris had been here, he'd have done you in for a certainty," he remarked, sweeping the doorway with his torch.

"If he'd been here," replied Adrian, "I should have heard him breathing. . . . There's no one here," he added in a whisper, after making as long a pause as he dared. "Listen!"

He made another pause; every ten seconds were of use. Then, "Lend me your torch," he suggested.

Without giving Sir Felix time to protest, Adrian snatched the torch, and played the light over the walls as he himself moved over toward the fireplace. Having circled the room at a height of six feet, he then proceeded to circle it at the level of the skirting-board. "Look here, Adrian!" cried Sir Felix impatiently. "Enough of this fooling!"

Adrian suddenly focused the light on Harris, held it, drew back a pace or two, cried out shakily. Sir Felix turned away from the window to which he had moved during Adrian's exhibition.

"Look!" muttered Adrian hoarsely.

"Good Lord!" cried Sir Felix. "It's Harris!"

"Harris?" repeated Adrian. He looked at Sir Felix, shuddered. "And I was here—in the room—alone!"

He focused the light on his friend's face. "My word, Sladen!" he cried. "It's a good thing you know me. . . . A good thing for *me*, I mean."

"Yes," replied Sir Felix, grimly. "A good thing for you."

Then, after a moment's pause, "May I have my torch?" he asked politely.

Adrian handed it over. "I think I'll go home now, if I may," he muttered, moving over toward the door.

"I should," replied Sir Felix dryly. "And if I were you," he added, focusing the light once more on Adrian's face, "I'd cut out this sort of thing in future."

"Cut it out?" cried Adrian hysterically. "I'll cut it out, old man, for keeps. I was a damned fool to come here. . . . A damned fool."

He turned to go out on to the landing. "Where did you change your clothes?" inquired Sir Felix suddenly.

Adrian hesitated for a barely perceptible second. "At Liverpool Street," he explained. "I left my suit-case there, coming from Aldeburgh."

"In the cloak-room?" suggested Sir Felix. Adrian nodded. "Have you got the ticket?"

"Yes," replied Adrian. He searched his pockets, then looked up, puzzled. "It isn't there," he muttered. "It must have slipped out of my pocket."

His thoughts ran a confused race. Was he leaving a clue that might lead to exposure? He had placed the ticket in his pocket an hour ago. It was gone. Where? "I shall have to go home as I am," he said.

"I should n't waste time," observed Sir Felix, looking keenly at Adrian. There was something he did n't quite understand, something intangible.

"What are *you* going to do?" asked Adrian quickly.

Sir Felix smiled. "Find the chap who killed Harris," he replied.

"Do you know who it was?" said Adrian.

"I can guess," replied Sir Felix.

Adrian looked at him, apparently bewildered.

"Who?" he asked.

"The man Harris threatened to do in," explained Sir Felix.

Adrian choked. His control was going, he felt physically ill, overstrained. He was trembling violently; in a moment his teeth would be chattering. He had all the symptoms of a man who was about to fall victim to pneumonia.

"I should n't care to be in his shoes," muttered Adrian. "How will you find him?"

The reply was startling to a man already on edge. "I'll find the woman," explained Sir Felix quietly. "The man won't be far away."

Adrian flinched in the glare of the torch. "The

woman," he repeated mechanically. Then he turned and went out and down the stairs, the light from the torch following him through the doorway.

Sir Felix rubbed his chin; it was a habit he had when puzzling out a problem.

CHAPTER XV

THE losing of the cloak-room ticket was a calamity; not only would Adrian be unable to change back into his evening-clothes, but in the pocket of his waistcoat was his latch-key; and in the suit-case itself was a bundle of treasury notes—kept there in case of emergency, the notes with which he was to pay for Vicky's flight from London. Somehow he would have to gain access to his house and secure some money.

If he were to appear at his own front door, ring the bell, and demand admittance in the clothes he was now wearing, such a proceeding would cause talk; and to cause talk was the last thing desirable at the moment. Talk percolated through such devious channels. He had risked quite enough in showing himself to Sir Felix. That had been necessary in order to give Vicky time to get away. But what would Drusilla think of such a proceeding? Pamela, too! Pam would wonder, probe, show exasperating curiosity. There was only one way to get in without being seen. He must slip down the area steps and reach the roof of the servants' quarters, and then by some means gain admittance to the inner hall through the little

window that overlooked the yard. It was risky, but what else could he do? The money must be obtained, and quickly. Vicky's train left at midnight. By then it was quite possible that a police call would have been sent out, giving instructions to watch the big railway stations. They must risk that. Vicky must leave London without a moment's delay, and he himself must get back to Hill Street in order to prove that his story, told to Sir Felix on the spur of the moment, was a true one. How else could he obtain the money except by breaking into his own house? He couldn't go to one of his clubs in his present costume. That, too, would cause talk. Besides, it was difficult to cash a check even at a club where you were well known at such a late hour.

Such were Adrian's thoughts as he made his way toward Hill Street. He had to walk, for he had given Vicky all his money. The fallen snow made the going heavy; he was tired, worn out with anxiety and strain. He had lost sight of the fact that he was only just up from a fairly severe accident. His mind was a seething whirlpool of plans, hopes, fears. The killing of Harris seemed a mere incident compared with the consequences entailed. Vicky must be saved. At all costs, Vicky must be saved. And equally important it was that Drusilla should be spared the knowledge of what had happened,

that she should be spared the shame of exposure, of publicity.

That he himself was an accessory after the fact to a murder troubled him little. Vicky had struck the man to save Adrian's life. But, if that had to be proved, the secret would be out, the whole discreditable story made public. And where was Vicky now? Had she gone straight to Paddington? He must get to Paddington as quickly as possible and find out.

Suppose he got to Paddington too late. He had given her fifty shillings; it was n't enough. Panic seized him. In unfrequented streets, he tried to run. His legs were heavy, his breathing difficult. The walk seemed endless. A clock chimed the hour and struck twelve. It was too late. The train would have gone. How could he find Vicky?

At Hill Street Drusilla still sat before the fire, waiting for Adrian. He had promised to return; he *must* keep his promise. If he failed, it would mean the end of everything.

The front door was opened with a latch-key; it was closed, and a moment later Pamela entered. Her face expressed surprise at the sight of Drusilla still seated by the fire. "I thought you 'd have gone to bed," she said.

"I could n't have slept," replied Drusilla. Then,

pulling herself back to the present with an effort, "Did you have a nice dance?" she inquired.

Pamela shook her head. "I was bored," she said. "That's why I came home early."

She lit a cigarette, then seated herself on the high fender. "I can't make up my mind," she exclaimed, "about Felix. Marriage is such a gamble, is n't it?"

Drusilla looked up defiantly. "Adrian and I have n't found it so," she replied.

Pamela looked at her curiously. "Have you been absolutely happy?" she asked.

Drusilla hesitated. "We have never been unhappy," she asserted.

Pamela made a movement of impatience. "You've been content with unruffled amiability?" she asked.

Drusilla shivered. "I've always been frightened of the unknown," she said, gazing thoughtfully at the fire.

Pamela was in a questioning mood. "How can you swear that you love a man," she asked, "unless you've had to prove it to yourself?"

"Do you mean by having to forgive him for something he's done?" inquired Drusilla. "Something that you yourself can't understand?"

Pamela nodded.

"I think I should be afraid of such a test," said Drusilla.

Pamela frowned. "Marriage must be a series of tests," she protested, "daily tests of temper, of understanding, of selfishness."

"I think a woman can forgive anything in her husband," murmured Drusilla, "except pretense."

"But if you don't know yourself," cried Pamela eagerly, "if you're only guessing at your own qualities, how can you tell whether you're pretending or not?"

Drusilla's reflections on the problem were interrupted by a single rap at the front door.

"Who's that, I wonder?" exclaimed Pamela. A single rap at the front door was unusual, particularly at such an hour.

"Emmett and the other servants have gone to bed," said Drusilla.

"Adrian has his key?" inquired Pamela.

"Of course," replied Drusilla.

Pamela rose. "I'll go and see, if you like," she suggested.

"Thank you, dear," said Drusilla.

Pamela went into the hall. In a few moments she returned, looking rather puzzled. "It's a girl," she explained, "asking for Adrian."

"A girl?" repeated Drusilla, equally puzzled.

"Perhaps you'd better ask her what she wants," said Pamela, with all the younger generation's preference for direct action.

Drusilla hesitated. Instinctively she shrank from

the ordeal of questioning a stranger. Why should a girl come to the house at such an hour, and ask for Adrian? It was a little mysterious, distinctly unusual. The abnormal always worried her.

She conquered her cowardice with some difficulty. "Ask her to come in," she said.

Pamela went out into the hall, returning in a moment with Vicky, who was carrying a suit-case.

The three were curiously contrasted. Drusilla, tall, graceful, willowy, reserved, a little frightened, almost ultra-feminine, seemed to Vicky like a being from another world, something worshipful, like a saint, coldly perfect, exquisite, with a saint's detachment. Pamela, picturesque, provocative, casual, seemed more human, more friendly, less of an awe-inspiring stranger. Vicky's almost exotic beauty appealed to both of them in different ways.

"What a subject for a picture!" thought Pamela, admiring the red-gold bobbed hair, the creamy skin, the red lips, the queer, haunting, tragic eyes.

"How she has suffered!" thought Drusilla, almost shocked by the terror in the strange girl's eyes.

There was a perceptible pause before Drusilla spoke. "Would you mind telling me why you came?" she inquired with an encouraging smile. "Mr. St. Clair is out."

Vicky looked at her, then at Pamela. Then she drew a deep breath, bit her lip, and spoke in a dull

mechanical tone. "I picked up a cloak-room ticket at Liverpool Street Station," she explained, "handed it in, and got this suit-case; then opened it to see what was inside it. A name was on all the things, so I looked it up in the telephone guide, and brought it here. . . . Adrian St. Clair was the name. . . . Is that right?"

She waited breathlessly for the answer. On it depended the solution of her suddenly formed theory. It was a theory that so far had scarcely taken tangible shape, that opened up all sorts of possibilities, that terrified her. She must know; she could go on no longer—wondering, doubting, theorizing.

"Yes," replied Drusilla quietly.

Then it *was* true. There *was* some connection between Jim Higgins and——

"I thought he might be here?" she said.

"It was very kind of you," murmured Drusilla, "to bring it all this way."

"Oh, that's all right!" replied Vicky half defiantly.

"I am his wife," explained Drusilla.

Vicky gazed at Drusilla intently—a long look that puzzled both Drusilla and Pamela. She scarcely knew what she was doing or saying. Her brain was in a whirl; her thoughts were racing, tumbling over each other. She was trying hard to fit it all in. The rich house, these exquisitely dressed women, the

atmosphere of luxury—the tremendous gulf that divided them from herself; it was all so stupendous, so unexpected. . . .

“I ’m afraid he ’ll be worried when he finds he ’s lost the ticket,” said Drusilla.

Pamela, who had scarcely taken her eyes from Vicky’s face, whose imagination was causing her mind to take great leaps into the dark, flicked the ash from her cigarette and seated herself once more on the cushioned fender. “You picked it up at Liverpool Street?” she asked.

“Yes,” replied Vicky sullenly. Then, with a sudden movement, “I ’ll be goin’ now,” she muttered.

“Wait a minute, please,” said Drusilla. “You must let me recompense you for all the trouble you have taken and the time you have lost.”

Vicky’s pride flashed into action. “I don’t want nothin’ from you,” she protested defiantly.

“Oh, please,” cried Drusilla soothingly.

Pamela, calmly curious, ruthlessly bent on finding out all that was to be known, smiled pleasantly at Vicky, encouraging confidence. “Do you know Mr. St. Clair?” she asked.

Vicky returned the look, but not the smile. She felt rather like an animal that had walked into a trap and was anxious to get out again before the trap functioned. Her mind was alert, suspicious. She was hating these women, resentful of their assurance, their air of breeding, their clothes, everything.

And yet she was attracted to them. They represented something she had always dimly, almost unknowingly, longed for. A man could be happy and content in such surroundings; everything would be done for him, his comforts assured. What chance had she against such odds? Her strength began to ebb; her spirit lost its resilience; a sense of the futility of fighting was creeping into her mind. Destiny had its favorites. Destiny was partial, and a bit of a snob. Destiny was a courtier, a lover of the rich man's table. Destiny, or Fate, had it in for such as herself.

Pamela had asked her, did she know Mr. St. Clair? Perhaps she did, perhaps not! How could she tell? In any case, for his sake, she had better deny it. "No," she replied, after a tiny pause. And she turned once more to go.

"It's very late," said Drusilla. "Where are you going?"

"I dunno," replied Vicky sullenly. "That's my affair, anyway. Good night!"

The lights began to dance, and the floor to heave. Her head was swimming. A sound like that of heavy traffic roared in her ears. The strain of the evening was beginning to tell. If only she could get out into the air, it would n't matter if she *did* make a fool of herself. If she stayed here another minute, she knew she would give herself away. She wanted to cry, longed for the physical relief of tears.

But to cry before these toffs would be humiliating! She heard Drusilla's voice, apparently miles away. "Won't you let me offer you a glass of wine and a sandwich?" Drusilla was saying, "You look tired."

Vicky was shaking all over with the effort she was making to control herself. She bit her lip, clenched her hands, tried to move toward the front door. "I'm all right," she protested with a shiver.

Then she suddenly gave in, and sank into a chair, sobbing terribly. It was a case of nervous reaction, pitiful, painful. "Oh, Gawd! Oh, Gawd!" she cried, seeing once more the picture of Harris lying inert on the floor, feeling once more the knife in her hand.

"Oh, this is terrible!" exclaimed Drusilla, quivering in sympathy, almost overwhelmed by the sudden sense of tragedy.

Pamela kept her head. Moving quickly over to Vicky, she placed her hand on the girl's shaking shoulder, using her will-power as a sedative. "Bit overstrained," she muttered. "I know. . . . Let yourself go a bit: it won't hurt you."

"I'm all right," muttered Vicky, her sobs still shaking her. "I'm all right, I tell you!" Then, after a few moments, she looked up, gazing with frightened eyes at the two women. "I saw a man killed to-night," she whispered, scarcely knowing what she was saying. "It give me a bit of a turn."

"How terrible!" gasped Drusilla. Then, pityingly, "You're so young, too," she added. "You ought to go to bed and try to sleep."

Vicky shuddered. "I would n't dare," she protested. "I would n't dare sleep. I'd see things."

"What do you see now?" inquired Pamela, pitying the girl, but enjoying the thrill.

Vicky stared at the carpet, her pupils dilated, her throat moving painfully. "The blood," she whispered, "like red ink—tricklin'—tricklin' to the floor."

"Oh, don't!" cried Drusilla, shocked, startled out of her self-control. "Please. . . ."

This was life in the raw, something she had never experienced before. It was terrifying. "But how good of you," she added, trying to speak quietly and soothingly, "notwithstanding the shock you've had, to bother about bringing back my husband's suit-case!"

Vicky pondered for a moment, then looked up inquiringly. "He's a gentleman, I s'pose," she asked, "your husband, I mean?"

"I suppose so," replied Drusilla with a faint smile.

"Has he always lived here?" inquired Vicky.

"Ever since we were married," said Drusilla, curious that such a question should be asked.

"How long's that?" asked Vicky.

"Nearly ten years," explained Drusilla.

"I did n't know there *were* such houses," muttered Vicky. "Must take a lot of money to keep it goin'. . . . Does he have to work for his livin'?"

"No," replied Drusilla, humoring the girl's apparent curiosity, imagining that by doing so she was helping to calm the jangled nerves. "His father left him a good deal of money."

"Seems rum," murmured Vicky reflectively.

Drusilla wondered why it should seem rum, not realizing what was in Vicky's mind. Pamela, her mind steeped in neurotic fiction, found very little in life that was surprising. She, too, was trying to adjust theories to facts. Adrian had always puzzled her.

Vicky rose. "Well," she exclaimed. "So-long!" and she moved toward the archway.

"Won't you please leave me your address?" asked Drusilla. "I know my husband will want to write and thank you."

Vicky shook her head. "Have n't got no address," she muttered. "You can tell him from me I was glad to do it, and that he need n't bother to write—nor to send any money. I sha'n't need it where I'm goin'."

Pamela turned to Drusilla, who was looking with puzzled anxiety at the mysteriously intriguing girl. "Does n't Emmett keep sandwiches in the pantry," she inquired, "in case Adrian comes in late?"

"I told him to," replied Drusilla.

"Wait a minute!" said Pamela to Vicky, who was making another effort to get away. "I'll go and get them," she announced to Drusilla. Then she disappeared in the direction of the pantry.

Pamela was too racked with curiosity to let the episode end so tamely; apart from that, she was genuinely desirous of helping the girl. Pamela was quick to catch on to any subtle *nuances* and to elaborate them in her mind. Undoubtedly, they were up against a mystery; it seemed strangely apparent that Adrian was in some way concerned with it. Why it should seem apparent, Pamela did n't know. It was an instinct, a flash of insight. Perhaps something in the girl's face had suggested it. If Adrian were to return suddenly, it would be interesting to study his face when he first caught sight of their visitor. Perhaps one of the reasons why women succeed at research work is that they hate a mystery. In any case, women are as a rule far more ruthless than men. Ruthlessness is curiosity carried to its *n*th degree.

Meanwhile, Drusilla had mentally jumped all the bridges that connected suspicion with accomplished fact. She knew. Adrian's behavior, his anxiety to keep his appointment, his conduct during the last few months. . . . What did such things point to? She looked at Vicky with intense interest. The girl was beautiful—almost uncannily beautiful; rough, unpolished, elemental, belonging to though not typi-

cal of her class. It was a beauty that might attract a man of artistic sensibilities. Lady Hamilton had not been remarkable for her brains; but men of genius had paid homage to her, fallen victims to her charm and her beauty. This girl belonged to a different century, an age that despised artifice, used direct speech, hit from the shoulder. This girl belonged to a type—a type that had stood apart throughout the centuries—a type that unconsciously aroused passion, stimulated desire, left sorrow in its wake. She could almost understand Adrian's being fascinated by such beauty. But Adrian belonged to her; she would fight for him, win him back, hold him.

"Are you quite sure you've never met my husband?" she asked.

Vicky became alert, suspicious. "What d'you mean?" she replied.

"Where is he?" said Drusilla.

"I dunno who your husband is," protested Vicky sullenly. "I dunno nothing about him."

Drusilla sighed. "I don't think you're telling me the truth," she said. "Are you?"

Vicky looked up, surprised. "He tells you all he does?" she asked.

Drusilla shook her head. Something in her attitude aroused Vicky's pity. This exquisitely dressed woman with the soft voice and kind eyes was in trouble, too. It seemed like a bond bringing them nearer together. Vicky became responsive;

her sullenness vanished. "Oh!" she cried, her voice quivering with sympathy. "Then you don't know that he's in trouble?"

Drusilla's heart missed a beat. "In trouble?" she repeated mechanically, her eyes fixed on Vicky. "How?"

Vicky made a characteristic movement of her shoulders. "They're after him," she whispered.

"Who?" inquired Drusilla, almost dreading what the answer might be.

"The cops," replied Vicky. Then, seeing the other's bewilderment, "The police," she added.

Drusilla was so obviously puzzled and incredulous that Vicky immediately realized her entire ignorance of the hidden chapters of her husband's life. "The police?" she repeated. "For what?"

Vicky grew a little impatient. She respected innocence, but this sort of ignorance was a little too much like ingenuousness. "You don't suppose he can keep such a place as this goin'," she protested, "without havin' to work pretty hard?"

"To work?" repeated Drusilla, feeling a trifle dazed.

"To steal," replied Vicky, who always preferred directness of speech. "He's been robbin' a bank." Then, shocked, aghast, at the sight of Drusilla's face, "You don't mean to say you didn't *know*?" she cried.

Drusilla swallowed hard once or twice, then

pulled herself together and spoke calmly. "You've made a mistake," she said. "My husband is n't a thief."

This denial irritated Vicky. "Ain't you proud of him?" she cried. "A man as can do the things *he* does?"

She herself was genuinely proud of Adrian's position in the world of crookdom—of what she believed him to be. There was no reflection of this pride in Drusilla's face; only horror, surprise, bewilderment.

"What makes you think my husband is a thief?" inquired Drusilla quietly.

Vicky grew reckless. "I don't think," she protested; "I *know*."

Drusilla sensed the pride, the touch of arrogance, the suggestion of possession, the instinctive disapproval, the reproach; her ear was tuned to these subtle *nuances*. She shrank back a little, scarcely conscious of what she was doing, entirely ignorant of what she was expressing in her face. "Have you been . . . intimate with him?" she asked in a whisper.

Vicky suddenly realized that the naked truth was like a whip to any one so sensitive as this delicately nurtured woman who had shown her kindness, consideration, and sympathy. She changed her tone, became ready to give what she had received, domin-

ated. "Oh, don't you worry about *that!*" she cried. "He 's not that sort."

Drusilla shivered. "You said he was in trouble?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Vicky. "I 'm in trouble myself, an' he 's tryin' to help me out."

The explanation rang true; it gave Drusilla more courage. "I assure you my husband is n't a thief," she protested.

"Would you chuck him out if he was?" inquired Vicky with sudden fierceness.

"No," said Drusilla quietly. "You love a man for what he is, not for what he does."

"That 's true," muttered Vicky, her eyes fixed on the fireplace.

The fact that she could put into words the vital fact that the last few months had taught her gave Drusilla renewed strength. Like conquering some physical weakness, it gave her courage to go further. It was a triumph over her instinctive fastidiousness, her natural shrinking from unpleasant facts. She became more sympathetic, more human, more assured. The real Drusilla was coming to life. Never again would she shrink from life.

"You say you're in trouble," she continued. "Can I help you?"

It was Vicky's turn to shrink back, but from a different motive. She, too, was learning. This

woman who had everything could feel, could suffer, equally with her less fortunate sisters. "You?" cried Vicky, her voice trembling. "No; 't isn't good for your sort to come up against *mine*."

Vicky had never had a woman friend; she had never known a mother's care. Something maternal in Drusilla appealed to her with almost tragic intensity. To know such a woman would be an eternal incentive toward that peculiar kind of worship that expressed itself in imitation, in loving service that shielded the beloved from everything hurtful. There must have been some very great quality in Vicky that enabled her to rise above her love for the husband in order to protect the wife. It was another illustration of a return to type, the type that expressed itself in giving.

"I don't want to go through life wearing blinkers," protested Drusilla.

Vicky shook her head. "There's things you don't know about, things you'd scarcely believe," she replied. Then, with a shudder, her tone bitter but with no suggestion of self-pity, "I'm a thief," she explained. "Just an ordinary thief. If I met you in the West End, I might sneak your bag—or your watch. Folks like you can't help folks like me. Better not try."

Drusilla smiled. "But my husband, you say, tried to help you? I'm not afraid to do what he does," she added proudly.

"He's a man," replied Vicky. "Men ain't wrapped up in cotton-wool."

"I know very little about men," said Drusilla reflectively. "I'm dreadfully ignorant."

"Gawd!" cried Vicky almost under her breath. "I wish *I* was."

This tragic cry almost tore Drusilla's heart to shreds. She rose and went over to the mantelpiece, her face turned toward the fire. After a moment, "Is my husband . . . fond of you?" she asked in a low voice.

Vicky flashed a look at Drusilla; then her face became expressionless. "No," she replied. "Never was. Never *could* be. Look at the difference between *us*—you an' me!"

Drusilla turned, facing her. "You're vital," she exclaimed. "And you're beautiful. You understand—oh, all the things I've tried to understand, and could n't. . . . I've been frightened of life."

"You've a right to be," protested Vicky bitterly. "Life ain't no picnic for most of us."

"I want to help you," said Drusilla gently, moving gracefully over to where the girl was seated. "I want to help you so much. I've been—as you say—wrapped up in cotton-wool too long. I've refused to recognize unpleasant things."

Suddenly her eyes focused on Vicky's arm; she shrank back with a cry, her hand instinctively cov-

ering her mouth. "What 's that on your sleeve?" she gasped.

"Oh, Gawd!" cried Vicky with a shudder, gazing at her arm, fascinated.

There was a moment of absolute silence, broken at last by Drusilla, who spoke in a half-strangled voice. "That man—the man you say you saw killed! Did my husband——"

"No," replied Vicky without waiting for Drusilla to complete her question.

Drusilla gazed at her, horrified, fascinated, incredulous. "Did . . . *you?*" she whispered.

Vicky looked at her for a moment, then nodded her head.

"It was an accident?" cried Drusilla, shaken, almost hysterical.

Vicky nodded. "He was tryin' to kill a friend of mine," she explained. "I did n't mean to finish him orf," she added, agonized appeal in her voice.

"He was trying to kill my husband," whispered Drusilla, as though she were solving a puzzle and had suddenly stumbled on to the key.

"He 'd broke outer quod," explained Vicky, her mind made up regarding her course of action. "Your—your husband reckernized him. He was afraid he 'd be took."

"Where was this?" inquired Drusilla quietly.

"Down east," replied Vicky vaguely. "Near where I live. . . . Your husband's a bloke that

goes about tryin' to do good. He was offerin' me money to go away and make a fresh start when Herb Harris blew in an' started a rough house."

Drusilla shuddered. She was trying to visualize the scene. It was beyond her comprehension.

"Oh, you need n't worry," continued Vicky, sensing Drusilla's thought. "He ain't hurt. I expect he'll be along presently." Then, with a sudden movement, she rose. "I must go," she exclaimed.

She realized that her ability to continue these explanations was uncertain, and she dreaded the thought of meeting the man they both loved in the present circumstances. She did n't care very much what became of herself; the sooner it was all over the better.

"You can't go like that," protested Drusilla. "The police will be watching for you. Why did you waste so much time, bringing back that suit-case?"

Vicky hesitated. She could n't very well confess the motive that had brought her to the house; it would be too complete a denial of that which she had asserted. It would be wiser to proclaim herself a suppliant for assistance. "I did n't ought to have opened his suit-case," she muttered. "I'd no business to come here, mixing him—and you—up in this affair. I dunno why I came. I suppose I was scared. He'd been good to me. You know, some of these torfs has kind hearts underneath their boiled shirts."

"Do you still think he's a thief?" inquired Drusilla.

Vicky gave a shrug. "It's as good a trade as most," she replied. "You see, his name was n't the name I'd known him by; and I wanted to see who he really was. Even if he *is* a thief, it don't make any difference. He was good to me, an' I'm grateful."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Pamela with a plate of sandwiches. "Try some of these," she suggested.

Vicky shuddered. "I could n't swallow nothin'," she said. "Thank you all the same."

"Pam," whispered Drusilla.

Pamela looked up. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"We've got to save her," said Drusilla under her breath, "to get her away."

"Good Lord!" cried Pamela. "You don't mean——"

Her eyes fastened on Vicky, then focused on the telltale sleeve as though drawn to it by some unseen pointer. She smothered a cry.

"It was to save Adrian's life," exclaimed Drusilla quickly. "The man was trying to kill him."

Pamela always kept her head in an emergency; her V.A.D. training was largely responsible for this trait. "We have n't much time," she exclaimed. Then she turned to Vicky, her eyes flashing with excitement, her plans quickly maturing. "I've got a

little two-seater car," she said. "I'll run you down to Southampton." She had for a time done duty on a hospital-train, distributing cigarettes and chocolates, post-cards and other medical comforts, and consequently realized that Southampton was a first-class jumping-off place.

Vicky looked up at her incredulously. "You don't mean——" she protested. Then, wonderingly, "Why should you do that for *me*?" she whispered.

Pamela, abhorrent of any suggestion of sentimentality, merely quoted Kipling. "Oh . . . 'The Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady,'" she replied. "Besides, your face fascinates me." Then she shivered, and her eyes hardened. "I hate to hear of a woman being tried for her life," she muttered.

"Pam!" cried Drusilla. "What about money?"

"You can wire me some in the morning," replied Pamela. "Wire me two hundred pounds to the South Western Hotel. They know me there. Make it payable at the Docks Post-office."

Then suddenly, like a reminder of the world of actualities, came a peremptory knock at the front door. The three women gazed at one another dismayed.

"Who's that?" cried Drusilla, trembling.

Pamela frowned. "It might be Felix," she replied. "Sir Felix Sladen," she explained in answer to Vicky's questioning look. "He must n't see *you*."

"She'd better go into the billiard-room," suggested Drusilla.

Pamela nodded. "There's a lavatory leading out of it," she told Vicky. "You can wash your hands, and—do your best to get that stain off your sleeve. Try some billiard chalk. . . . Directly the coast's clear, I'll get my car."

She was at her best when there was need for action. Like the average modern girl, excitement was necessary to her. To exist as a cabbage was intellectual death. Pamela had an immense contempt for the clam. If she had to be a fish, she would rather be a porpoise. Was a clam a fish or a vegetable, she wondered. Anyway, it was an absurdity.

She threw open the door leading to the billiard-room.

"Don't turn up the lights," cried Drusilla.

Vicky shuddered. "Have I got to sit in the dark?" she protested.

The knock at the front door was repeated still more peremptorily.

"It's only for a few minutes," explained Pamela. "You can turn on the light in the lavatory; it has no window."

Vicky moved mechanically over to the billiard-room door. "Right-o," she muttered, and disappeared into the darkness.

"There's the lavatory," whispered Pamela.

"You 'll find the switch just on the right of the door. Shut the door before you light up."

She locked the door leading to the billiard-room and pocketed the key. "A Madonna of the gutter!" she exclaimed, admiration in her voice. "By Jove! She 'd pay for dressing."

"You 'd better let Felix in," said Drusilla.

CHAPTER XVI

PAMELA lit a cigarette, then went to the front door and admitted Sir Felix. "Come in and get warm," she suggested.

Sir Felix removed his overcoat and came over to the fire. "Where's Adrian?" he inquired casually.

"Not home yet," replied Drusilla. "Do you want to see him?"

"Very much," admitted Sir Felix. "That's my excuse for calling so late."

He was puzzled by Adrian's absence; it started a train of thought which he had previously endeavored to avoid. Convinced of the fact that nothing was impossible in this queer jumble we self-complacently referred to as civilization, he was nevertheless strongly averse from including his friends in that heterogeneous company on which suspicion might be expected to fall. Adrian's behavior had been peculiar; but Adrian was rather a peculiar person. He was a difficult man to place.

"Won't you have something to drink, and a sandwich?" asked Drusilla.

"Thank you," replied Sir Felix.

After a sandwich and a whisky and soda, a man

usually recovers his natural poise. Lighting a cigarette, Sir Felix became communicative. He frequently became communicative when he wanted to solve a problem. "I've had rather a busy evening, trailing an escaped convict," he explained. "The man who broke out of Portland."

"Did you find him?" inquired Pamela.

"Yes," replied Sir Felix reflectively. "Yes; I found him. He had been stabbed."

"How terrible!" exclaimed Drusilla after a tiny pause.

"Good Lord!" murmured Pamela with a quick glance at Drusilla. "Who did it?"

"Oh, that's pretty obvious," replied Sir Felix quietly. "He was fond of some girl who had turned him down for another fellow."

Drusilla looked up questioningly. Pamela, her mind alert, was apparently absorbed in contemplation of her shoes.

"He probably tried to take it out of the girl," continued Sir Felix, proclaiming his theory in order to obtain what might possibly prove to be helpful criticism; "she lost her head, and stabbed him. We shall soon find out for certain. All the stations are being watched. She can't get away."

"Who was the other man?" asked Pamela. Drusilla put down the work she had taken up and listened. She was forcing herself to be calm, holding herself in with a tremendous effort.

"A man named Higgins," replied Sir Felix. "Rather a mysterious personality. Turned up in the East End about a year ago. Goes away a good deal. Seems pretty flush financially. . . . Reputed to be a scientific burglar on the grand scale. No record of him at the yard. . . . Well, he met this girl. . . . She's simply potty about him. They're supposed to be living together at a place called Parker's Court, where the murder took place."

He glanced at Drusilla, who was biting her lip. Something in her appearance checked him. He looked round at Pamela, whose face wore its customary mask of indifference. "What's the matter?" he inquired. "Am I upsetting you?"

"No," replied Drusilla, her voice under control, though her hands and feet felt like blocks of ice and her head was burning. "I'm interested." She looked at him questioningly. "You say they were living together?"

Sir Felix smiled a little grimly. "Marriage is rather too permanent a business for the criminal classes to indulge in," he explained.

Drusilla nodded. She was learning quickly. She scarcely recognized herself. Pamela was smoking thoughtfully, apparently not listening to the conversation. Actually her brain was busy, planning Vicky's escape.

"And you think this girl killed the escaped convict, Harris?" inquired Drusilla.

"Did I tell you that his name was Harris?" asked Sir Felix quickly.

Drusilla shook her head. "It was in the evening papers," she explained. "He found them there together, and attacked the man Higgins?"

"Evidently," replied Sir Felix.

"I shall get my hands on him directly," he continued, after finishing his whisky and soda. "I have n't any sympathy with the chap who was murdered; he was a thorough ruffian, with a bad record. But the law is the law, and I have to see that it is carried out."

Glancing round the room, his eyes fastened on the suit-case. "Is n't that Adrian's suit-case?" he inquired. "If he's not here, how did it come?"

"Some one brought it," explained Drusilla after a quick glance at Pamela.

"Who?" asked Sir Felix.

"Adrian dropped the cloak-room ticket," said Pamela. "A girl picked it up and brought it here."

Sir Felix looked up curiously. "The ticket?" he inquired.

"No," replied Pamela. "The suit-case."

"It was kind of her, was n't it?" remarked Drusilla calmly.

"Very," agreed Sir Felix. Then, casually, "What was she like?" he asked.

Drusilla smiled. "My dear Felix," she protested, "I don't even remember what she was wearing."

Sir Felix was puzzled. What were these two trying to hide? How did they come to be mixed up in it? Their apparent nonchalance stimulated his suspicions.

"She was beautiful, passionate, temperamental," explained Pamela. "You noticed her lips and her eyes. Especially her lips. Her hands weren't clean but very well shaped. In France she would probably have been a famous artist's model."

Drusilla gasped. Why should Pamela paint the girl's portrait so accurately? Was she crazy? But perhaps she had something up her sleeve. You never knew what Pamela was really thinking or planning.

"Where is she now?" inquired Sir Felix.

"Lord knows," replied Pamela with a shrug. "She just left the suit-case and went off."

Drusilla mentally applauded her cousin's admirable piece of acting.

"Did she ask for Adrian?" inquired Sir Felix.

"Naturally," replied Drusilla.

Sir Felix frowned. "How much money did you give her?" he asked.

Drusilla shook her head. "She refused to take any money."

"She refused?" repeated Sir Felix incredulously. "Did she leave an address?"

"No," explained Drusilla; "she said she didn't want any thanks or reward."

Sir Felix had heard enough. Such altruism sounded too good to be true. Adrian *was* mixed up in this affair in some mysterious fashion, and both Drusilla and Pamela had somehow tumbled to the fact. It was a trifle staggering. Sir Felix gave nothing away; his manner was cool, easy, sufficiently casual to disarm suspicion. Pamela had always puzzled him; she was so inscrutable, unexpected. But Drusilla had never before deviated from the normal. She would not be doing so now without some tremendously urgent reason. Luck appeared to be with him; Sir Felix congratulated himself on the fact. At the same time, he was conscious of a distinct feeling of dread lest the veil might be rent too suddenly, causing pain and sorrow to those he liked and admired.

"May I use your telephone?" he asked.

"Of course," replied Drusilla.

Sir Felix lit another cigarette and disappeared into the semi-darkness of the corridor.

"Do you think he suspects her?" asked Drusilla anxiously.

Pamela nodded. She recognized Sladen's ability and had no illusions regarding his line of conduct. For the moment he was the enemy, to be hoodwinked, deceived, thwarted. To women the personal equation is of more importance than ethical considerations. The law was a toy for men to amuse themselves with; to women it was either a

useful means of avoiding unpleasantness or an irritating hindrance to the fulfilment of their wishes.

"Why did you describe her so accurately?" protested Drusilla.

"Because he 'll be looking for her everywhere but here," explained Pamela. "I 'll get her away all right."

"Yes," whispered Drusilla. "For Adrian's sake." She bit her lip, then shivered as she murmured, "Poor Adrian!"

Pamela looked up, astonished. "Drusilla," she cried. "You 're not so cold as you seem!"

"I 'm not cold," replied Drusilla quietly.

"And I thought Adrian equally passionless," muttered Pamela with some bitterness.

"It 's better to be responsive to every emotion," said Drusilla, "than to be passionlessly correct—as *I* was."

"I thought he had disciplined all human nature out of his character," protested Pamela, realizing for the first time that even the young might be mistaken in their judgments. "Does any woman know what any man is?"

"That poor girl," whispered Drusilla pityingly, "sitting there in the dark—terrified!"

"Rotten," agreed Pamela laconically.

She moved over to the archway and listened. "He 's telephoning to Scotland Yard," she said, re-

turning to the fireplace. "How are we going to get rid of him?"

"If only I knew where Adrian was and could warn him," murmured Drusilla.

"Warn him?" inquired Pamela. She looked at Drusilla, then frowned. "Is he mixed up in this affair?"

Drusilla hesitated, then spoke in a whisper. "He 's the man Harris threatened to do in."

"Good Lord!" cried Pamela, amazed as much by Drusilla's manner as by the statement made. "How do you know that?"

Drusilla glanced in the direction of the billiard-room. "She told me."

Pamela plainly showed her admiration for Drusilla's attitude. "You 've got grit," she muttered. "If I was married, and my husband——" She left the sentence unfinished.

"Through your own fault," cried Drusilla with a suggestion of bitterness; "because you were too detached, too impersonal, too fastidious to be natural. Because you failed to satisfy him."

She hid her face in her hands. She was learning, and the lesson was painful.

"Let Adrian see you as you are—now," cried Pamela eagerly.

"I did," explained Drusilla with a sob. "Tonight. . . . Too late."

Pamela, too, was learning. She was too good a sportswoman not to recognize another's prior right. Her infatuation for Adrian had died a natural death; she experienced a new and rather beautiful tenderness for Drusilla—a tenderness born of misunderstanding. She had been arrogant, unfair to Drusilla, impatient with Adrian for not taking advantage of the many opportunities she had given him. She was ashamed of herself. She had failed to appreciate Drusilla's character. And she had been unfair to Felix, had kept him dangling after her—throwing him an occasional bone. He had been patient, loyal, unselfish. She would be different in future. She would try very hard to prove herself worthy of such chivalrous devotion.

She looked up as he reëntered the room. Yes; she would miss him if he went out of her life. He was a strong man; his voice was attractive, his chin firm, his eyes steady; he was complete master of himself. A man who knew his own mind was always worth cultivating. He could be ruthless, too. He would not be an easy man to deceive. To be caught out in a lie by such a man would be an unpleasant experience. And it was curiously ironical that, just as she had begun to realize his good points, she should risk offending him vitally—for the sake of a poor girl-waif from the slums. But that was life all over. Life was a chaotic mass of contradictions; living was the most irritating form of excite-

ment ever invented. To die might, as Barrie says, be a great adventure. Naturally one would want to know where one was going to, and how, and what it would be like when one got there; but life had a curious hold on one; it attracted, repelled, fascinated. One held on grimly despite trouble, worry, tragedy, starvation, misery, loneliness, always with the hope that the luck might turn, that the gods might smile for a change. What had this girl to live for? She was Tragedy personified. Her life was forfeit. But the vital spark persisted. Battered, terrified, almost hopeless, she still clung on. Was that bravery? Or was it just instinct? Poor kid! huddled there in the dark, seeing things—like red ink—on the floor. . . .

Sir Felix was examining the suit-case. "You say the girl picked up the cloak-room ticket?" he inquired. "Where?"

"At Liverpool Street Station," replied Drusilla.

"Has Adrian a latch-key?" said Sir Felix. Drusilla nodded. "You were expecting him back to-night?" She nodded again. "How would it be to telephone to his club, to ask if he's there?"

"He belongs to so many clubs," protested Drusilla.

"Try them all," suggested Sir Felix.

Drusilla, much against her will, agreed. Somehow it seemed like interfering with Adrian's liberty to ring him up at his clubs. A club was sacred; it

was one of the few remaining spots from which women should be excluded. Few women possessed the club spirit. Even as waitresses, though far more competent and infinitely more picturesque than men, they were out of place. Drusilla, though she might not understand men, was curiously sympathetic toward their prejudices; and she had been taught quite early in life that to ring a man up at his club was one of those things that were n't done. Nevertheless, in the circumstances, she felt bound to accede to her visitor's request.

With Drusilla's disappearance, Sir Felix's manner altered. His manner became quick, alert, more authoritative. Opening the suit-case, he ran his hands through the contents. "His latch-key's here," he exclaimed, producing it. Then he closed the suit-case and walked toward the fireplace, deep in thought.

"You don't believe what the girl said?" inquired Pamela, throwing her cigarette into the fire and leaning one arm on the mantelpiece.

Sir Felix laughed rather grimly. "I take my doses of coincidence with a lot of soda-water," he replied.

Pamela gave a shrug. "Without coincidence, there 'd be no drama," she protested; "and life's full enough of drama—Heaven knows."

"When drama touches one's friends," remarked Sir Felix reflectively, "it makes one think."

Pamela looked up keenly. "You suspect that the girl knows Adrian?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Sir Felix; "that's why I asked Drusilla to telephone."

"How could she know him?" protested Pamela. "Unless——"

Sir Felix looked at her steadily. "Unless?" he repeated.

"Oh, don't snap my head off!" cried Pamela irritably.

She moved over to the couch, seating herself on the arm nearer to the fireplace. "What do you suspect?" she inquired.

Sir Felix gave a shrug. "Week-end golf, post-war style," he said. "Like so many men, he has an intrigue with a woman and calls it golf. Golf covers a multitude of explanations. . . . Has he ever shown any signs of running off the rails?"

Pamela laughed—a trifle ruefully. "I thought he was a man who seemed incapable of appreciating his opportunities," she confessed.

"He was always going away," continued Sir Felix, curiously reminiscent of a judge summing up; "usually to golf. It has become an accepted institution—a well-built-up alibi. . . . Eye-wash! . . . Yet one has always accepted him on his face-value."

Pamela was loyal enough to Adrian to make an effort to defend him when attacked by another. To rag him herself was quite a different thing from

allowing some one else to do so. "Being married to Drusilla must have been rather like being married to a *pêche Melba*—with very little peach. Drusilla is only just waking up to realities."

"The woman who would attract him," continued Sir Felix in his quiet, assured, even, dispassionate voice, as he slowly built up his theory—as though thinking aloud, "would be Drusilla's antithesis. It would n't be a sudden impulse but a calculated plan. . . . You figure a man always on the verge of wild waves of revolt, held down by training—or the fear of consequences. There's your motive! . . . He goes down to the underworld, where life is raw and savage, lets himself go, then returns to—this. And the girl comes here, perhaps to find out who he is, perhaps to blackmail him."

"That's unfair," protested Pamela, shuddering at the ruthless accuracy of his deductions.

"Ah!" exclaimed Sir Felix, his theory now established in his own mind, for Pamela's protest had been, to him, very eloquent. "I was merely theorizing," he added casually. He smoked for a moment or two without speaking. Then, with apparent indifference, "You've met her?" he asked.

"I'd stake my honor on her loyalty to any one she cared for," retorted Pamela warmly. A glance at his face told her that she was saying too much. Her own manner became as casual as his. "You suspect her of being mixed up in this?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Sir Felix, throwing his cigarette into the grate and facing her. "I found Adrian down there—more or less disguised—alone with the murdered man."

"Good Lord!" cried Pamela. She swallowed with some difficulty. Unconsciously, she was pressing the nails of one hand into the flesh of the other.

"He made a big bluff to explain his presence," continued Sir Felix. "I fell to it—for a moment, and let him go."

He glanced at his watch, then took another cigarette from the silver box on the table near the couch.

"Where was the girl?" asked Pamela.

"The murder took place in her room," explained Sir Felix, lighting his cigarette; "but she was n't there. Yet she turns up here—an hour or so later—with Adrian's suit-case, and a story of having picked up the cloak-room ticket. It does n't sound convincing."

He threw the match into the grate, glanced at Pamela, then went to the small window between the writing-table and the billiard-room door. Opening it, he leaned out, gave a penetrating look toward the yard, then closed the window without fastening it, and strolled back toward the fireplace. "It's still snowing," he said. "Have you a latch-key?"

"Yes," replied Pamela. "Why?"

Sir Felix took a sandwich. "I'm sorry you let that girl go," he remarked.

"What excuse had we for detaining her?" inquired Pamela.

"Quite!" agreed Sir Felix, flicking his fingers with his silk handkerchief. "You came back by taxi, I suppose?"

Pamela nodded. She was distinctly puzzled by his methods.

"Are your shoes waterproof?" asked Sir Felix.

Pamela laughed and exhibited her dainty footwear. "Not exactly," she said.

"How you can dance in those high heels," muttered Sir Felix, examining the heels with apparent interest. Then he took the electric torch from his pocket. "Would you care for a little walk?" he inquired.

"Where?" asked Pamela, still more bewildered.

Sir Felix smiled. "There are not too many people about," he replied, "at this hour. It's been snowing for some time. We might be able to guess in which direction the girl went."

Pamela mentally reviewed the situation. If she hesitated, it would prove to Felix that she shrank from the result of the search. He would realize that the girl was still in the house. The game would be up. These thoughts flashed through her mind during the moment it took to pull her cloak

closer round her shoulders. "All right," she agreed laconically.

"You 'll ruin your shoes," said Sir Felix.

"Does n't matter," replied Pamela.

She shivered. "You have n't fastened that window," she protested.

"No," said Sir Felix, putting on his coat. "It looks over the roof of the servant' quarters, does n't it?"

Pamela nodded. "Could it be reached from the street?" he inquired.

"Probably," said Pamela.

"Ah!" murmured Sir Felix, buttoning up his coat, and turning up his collar. "Well, let 's have a look for those footprints."

As they reached the outer hall he switched off the lights. "Do you mind?" he asked.

"What did you do that for?" cried Pamela, a little startled by the sudden darkness.

Sir Felix chuckled. "Economy," he said.

A moment later the front door closed. A coal dropped in the grate. For a moment or two there was absolute silence. Then the window that Sir Felix had left unfastened was cautiously raised a few inches from the outside.

CHAPTER XVII

ADRIAN crept in through the window, closed it, and then stood for a moment, motionless, listening intently. The house seemed quiet, the lights were out, though the fire was still burning cheerfully. In his shabby clothes, with his coat collar turned up and a colored handkerchief round his neck, he almost ludicrously resembled a burglar of the traditional type.

He moved quietly over to where the switches were placed, listened again, then turned on a couple of the lights. A fairly strong whisky and soda braced his nerves. Then a glance from behind the curtains of the window looking out on to the street caused him to make a quick movement toward the switches. Leaving the room unlighted save for the reflection from the fire, he mounted the stairs and sought his dressing-room on the second floor.

He had scarcely reached the first landing before the front door opened and Sir Felix followed Pamela into the hall. Sir Felix closed the door softly and put on the chain. "Why do you do that?" whispered Pamela.

"Sorry!" replied Sir Felix. "Matter of habit." Pamela switched on the lights of the inner hall,

shivered, felt her shoes, which were sopping, and went over to the fireplace, snuggling down on the fender, grateful for the warmth.

Sir Felix followed her into the room. Something on the floor engaged his attention—a flake of snow that had not yet had time to melt. He followed its trail to the front door, then, returning, glanced at the staircase; then, after taking off his coat, which he left on a chair just inside the inner hall, he moved thoughtfully toward the small window, then back to the larger window. Then he joined Pamela by the fireplace.

“Drusilla’s a long time telephoning,” he remarked.

Pamela nodded.

“I wish you’d tell her not to bother,” said Sir Felix.

Pamela rose reluctantly and went along the corridor in the direction of the telephone cupboard. The moment her back was turned, Sir Felix rapidly slipped over to the billiard-room door, turned the handle, realized that the door was locked, and promptly returned to the fireplace. As he sat down on the fender and lit a cigarette, Pamela and Drusilla came into the room.

“He’s not at any of his clubs,” said Drusilla.

“It does n’t seem reasonable that he *should* be,” remarked Pamela, as she joined Sir Felix by the fireplace.

It was obvious that Felix had no intention of going, and it was absolutely necessary for the success of her scheme that he should go. This inaction was exasperating. Every minute made that poor girl's position more dangerous. When Pamela undertook to do anything, it was in her nature to desire that the task should be completed without delay. But a false move might prove fatal; the slightest indiscretion would probably give the whole show away. She chafed, rebellion in her heart, unreasonably irritated by her lover's coolness.

"Pamela!" cried Drusilla. "Your shoes. . . . They're soaking. Where have you been?"

"Tracing footprints in the snow," replied Pamela with a resentful glance at Sir Felix.

"Unsuccessfully," explained Sir Felix calmly. "There were none leading away from the house."

Drusilla looked questioningly at Pamela, who was apparently occupied in assessing the damage to her shoes.

"If we're all going to sit up for Adrian," suggested Sir Felix, "could n't we have a game of bridge . . . or billiards?"

Pamela shivered. Then he *did* suspect something. But what a hateful way he had of showing it! "I'm much too tired," she protested ungraciously, "and Drusilla does n't play."

Drusilla, unsuspecting of the sudden antagonism

between her two companions, looked up at Sir Felix questioningly. "Are you convinced of that poor girl's guilt?" she asked.

Sir Felix met her gaze steadily. "She will be hard put to it to prove her innocence," he replied.

"Oh," cried Pamela passionately, "I can't bear it when you talk in this ruthless, merciless way!"

"I have my duty to perform," said Sir Felix.

"The girl's been here," continued Pamela. "We've spoken to her. Don't you see what it means to Drusilla—to us all?"

"Quite," said Sir Felix.

"*Must* you hound her down," protested Pamela indignantly, "for killing a brute?"

"He was an escaped convict," pleaded Drusilla, "a criminal."

"The law takes no account of a man's character where his life is concerned," replied Sir Felix.

It was the old story: the duel between the official point of view and the human. The law was a machine, and no amount of excuses could make it swerve a hair's-breadth from its course. Both Drusilla and Pamela felt that they were up against something bigger than themselves, something immutable, rigid, cold, logical; the course of justice could not be swayed by appeals to sentiment; it could only be tricked by a quick brain and an active intelligence.

Adrian, having changed rapidly, washed, and brushed his hair, stole cautiously from his room and descended the stairs. The shock from realizing that the lights were on and the hall occupied made him pause for a moment. He exerted his will-power with a gigantic effort, and it was a calm and apparently unperturbed person that entered the inner hall in his usual easy, casual manner. "Hallo!" he remarked. "I thought every one would have gone to bed."

To Sir Felix his appearance was the logical outcome of the situation; the purposely opened window had done the trick. The pieces of the puzzle were fitting into their destined places. To Drusilla, his arrival was a welcome relief. He had promised to return; he had kept his word. "Adrian," she cried. "I've been so anxious about you."

"Why?" inquired Adrian. "There was nothing to worry about."

Drusilla looked puzzled. "How did you get in?" she asked.

Adrian glanced at Sir Felix, then smiled. "Some one very kindly left the window open," he explained. He lit a cigarette. Suddenly his eyes focused on his suit-case. He stared at it, bewildered; then looked up to find three pairs of eyes fixed intently on him. His manner was a triumph of self-control. "How the devil did my suit-case come here?" he inquired.

For a moment there was no reply. Then Drusilla broke the silence. "You lost the cloak-room ticket, did n't you, Adrian?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Adrian. Then, struck by the silence, he looked up. "Well?" he inquired.

"A girl brought it," explained Drusilla; "she said she had picked up the ticket."

Drusilla's one idea at the moment was to endeavor to convey some warning to Adrian to let him see how much was known to Sir Felix. Those whom her fastidiousness, her shrinking from life, her apparent coldness, might have irritated in days past could not now have withheld a tribute of admiration for her courage and coolness under pride-shattering blows. Her self-command was amazing.

Adrian frowned. "How did she know where I lived, or who I was?" he asked.

"She opened the suit-case," replied Drusilla quietly. "Your name was on the clothes."

Adrian tumbled to the fact that Vicky had been at the house. The idea was a little bewildering. Why had she come? What had she said? Why had she ignored his instructions? Why did Sladen and Pamela look at him so curiously? How much did Drusilla know—or guess? Had Sladen left the window open for him on purpose, knowing that he had lost his key? Had he walked into a trap? Were the dreaded revelations about to be made public? The all-important thing was to get Vicky

away. But where was she? Where had she gone? Did Drusilla know? His brain almost refused to function. Bewilderment was rendering him incapable of action. He must know where he stood, what had become of Vicky! He must know how he stood with Drusilla.

"Where is she?" he inquired.

"She would n't stay," explained Drusilla. "She would n't even take a reward. She's gone."

She had gone. Then she still had a chance of escape. But how could she escape without money? How was he to find her, to take the money to her? Had she gone to Paddington—too late to catch the midnight train?

"Do you know where she went?" he asked.

"She would n't leave her address," said Pamela, watching him with almost morbid interest. It was not the morbidity of the average Briton who will stand all night on the chance of being admitted to a court of justice in order to enjoy the excitement of seeing a fellow-creature tried for his or her life; the morbidity of one to whom another's agony gives a fascinating thrill; the morbidity that, in times gone by, attracted men and women of education and what was ironically referred to as refinement to the spectacles, given free to the public, of hangings and beheadings, of tortures and burnings, of drawings and quarterings; the morbidity that, even in these slightly more civilized days, is still attracted by

street accidents, by the sight of a fox being "broken up," and by surreptitious visits to the bull-ring. In Pamela's case, it was the morbidity of the psychologist, the dissector of emotions, the chronicler of human tragedies. "She said we could tell you from her that she was glad to do it," explained Drusilla; "that you need n't bother to send her any money; that she would n't need it where she was going."

Adrian was almost overwhelmed by a sudden dread. Suppose Vicky were to solve the problem for herself. The idea was ghastly. He shuddered, then looked up to find Sir Felix watching him intently. Adrian smiled—once more the polished man of the world. "Pretty sporting of her," he exclaimed.

Sir Felix nodded. The puzzle had not yet entirely taken shape. The edges were a little uneven.

Pamela, with intention to warn Adrian, intervened. "Felix seems to think that she's in some way mixed up in that murder case."

Adrian shook his head. "If Felix will excuse my saying so," he protested, "that seems rather far-fetched. He might as well suspect *me*."

With a perfectly steady hand, he mixed himself a whisky and soda.

"Quite," agreed Sir Felix coolly.

"Adrian!" cried Drusilla. "Don't talk like that!"

Adrian chuckled. "These professional sleuths," he murmured.

As he lifted his tumbler to drink, he caught Sir Felix's eye. Neither moved for a moment. The silence was painful. Then Adrian put down the tumbler and moved over to Sir Felix. "Good Lord, man!" he muttered. "You don't mean——"

He looked at Drusilla, then back to Sir Felix. "I must see you alone," said Sir Felix under his breath.

Adrian nodded. The worst had happened. Sladen knew, or at any rate suspected. Drusilla probably guessed. If Drusilla knew, it simplified the problem. The one necessity of the moment was to save Vicky. His explanation with Drusilla must wait until that was safely accomplished.

"I want a word with Felix," said Adrian, "alone."

"Adrian!" cried Drusilla appealingly. "Don't shut me out of your life."

The appeal thrilled him but almost overwhelmed him with shame and self-reproach. Drusilla was loyal to him, intended to proclaim her loyalty whatever happened.

"Please go on, Felix, with what you were going to say," said Drusilla quietly.

"You can't do that," protested Adrian passionately. "Think what it means to Drusilla—to us all."

"I don't want to be kept in the dark," cried

Drusilla. "Adrian is my husband. I have a right to share everything with him."

"Go on, Sladen," muttered Adrian with a gesture of surrender.

Sir Felix had become the official, cool, assured, relentless. He was compelled by duty to ignore the awkwardness of the situation: he, a guest, subjecting his host to an examination, in the presence of his hostess and of the girl to whom he was virtually engaged. "I must tell you," he explained, "that you will be asked to account for your various absences during the last year."

Adrian nodded. "Including my absence to-night?" he asked.

"Not only to-night," replied Sir Felix.

"At the same time," continued Sir Felix, "I must warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you."

Drusilla gave a cry of agonized protest. Adrian looked up alertly. "*May* be used, not *will* be used," he exclaimed. "Thanks, Sladen, for that concession."

"Can you account for your evening from the time you left this house," inquired Sir Felix, "until I found you at Parker's Court?"

"Yes," said Adrian. Then with a rather piteous appeal, "Drusilla! Won't you leave us?" he begged.

She shook her head.

"Did you kill the man Harris?" asked Sir Felix.

"No," replied Adrian. Then he looked at Drusilla. "*You* don't think——" He pulled himself up, and turned to his questioner with a shrug. "Go on, Sladen!" he muttered.

"Forgive me," said Sir Felix to Drusilla. Then, to Adrian, "What connection with you had that young woman," he asked, "the woman who was in the room with you when I arrived, who slipped out as I spoke to you?"

"None," replied Adrian, realizing that it would be useless to deny that Vicky had been there.

"Ah," cried Sir Felix sharply. "Then, if you did n't kill Harris, she did."

"No," said Adrian, moving over to the fireplace and throwing away his cigarette.

Drusilla had covered her face with her hands. "Adrian," she whispered. He turned, facing her, dismayed. "You were there—to-night—after what you——"

Her lips refused to finish the sentence. She was suffering acutely.

The calm, even tones of Sir Felix broke in upon this sudden excursion into drama that was so closely akin to tragedy. "Harris went there with the express purpose of doing some one in," he said. "Who was the man he had threatened? You?"

Adrian made no reply for a moment. Then he nodded.

"Why?" inquired Sir Felix. His voice assumed a more pitiless tone. "It is alleged that the man in question had robbed Harris of his girl," he suggested.

"Harris lied," replied Adrian. "The girl belonged to herself; neither to Harris, nor to me."

"Adrian! Is that true?" cried Drusilla, a sudden gleam of hope in her heart. "Please tell me: is it true?"

"It's true," said Adrian quietly. "I've done some damned rotten things; circumstances drove me to them—instincts, impulses! But not that."

Drusilla was thankful, Pamela a little incredulous. It is a curious fact that, when a man takes advantage of a woman's offer to surrender all that she holds most sacred, his conduct is received by other women with a shudder in which lurks the germ of pity; and that, when he refuses to take advantage of such an offer, his conduct is greeted by other women with a shudder of disapproval and contempt. He is labeled dull and unenterprising. To respect a woman may be ethically correct, but to a strictly moral audience such an attitude appears to be peculiarly reprehensible. "Men don't do such things," they say; "or, if they do, they can't be men."

"Was it necessary for you to go away from me," asked Drusilla, her voice quivering, "to mix yourself up with such people?"

Adrian made an expressive movement of his hands. "The riddle of the universe," he cried. "*Why* do we do *what* we do?"

"You knew that Harris had threatened you?" inquired Sir Felix.

Adrian nodded. "He told me when he was here this evening."

Sir Felix was a trifle staggered. "Here?" he exclaimed. "At this house? And you recognized him?"

"He told me who he was," explained Adrian.

Sir Felix digested this statement. Then, "You had met him before?" he asked.

"No," replied Adrian. "It was pure coincidence his coming here, breaking into the larder on his way from Paddington to the East End."

Sir Felix paid little attention to pure coincidence. "Did he recognize you when he met you at Parker's Court?" he asked.

"No," replied Adrian.

"Are you sure?" inquired Sir Felix. "Did n't he recognize you, threaten to expose you; and that was what made you kill him?"

"I did n't kill him," protested Adrian, his nerves raw under this repeated questioning. "Damn you, man! I'm not lying!"

"You knew you were in danger," continued Sir Felix dispassionately. "You could have had him arrested, but you did n't."

"I'd given my word," explained Adrian, "before I knew who he was."

Sir Felix looked incredulous. "Yet you realized the risk to yourself, and to the young woman, if he attempted to carry out his threat?"

"Yes," said Adrian grimly. "But I thought we might settle the problem with our fists."

Sir Felix looked up keenly. "You were ready to fight for her?" he asked.

"Not *for* her," explained Adrian quietly. "On her behalf."

"I see," murmured Sir Felix cynically. "A matter of chivalry?"

"Oh, don't be so ruthless!" cried Pamela indignantly.

Sir Felix ignored the interruption. "You were ready to risk publicity, to risk Drusilla finding out everything?" he asked.

"I've known," said Drusilla quietly, "for a long time—that Adrian was living another life."

"You've known?" cried Adrian. Then, after a long pause, "Who told you?" he inquired.

"*You* told me, Adrian," she replied, "by your manner. Wives who—who love their husbands have a sixth sense."

Adrian made a gesture of helplessness. She had known, and yet to-night she had——

"I've realized," said Drusilla thoughtfully, "how much of it was my fault."

"I've been mad," cried Adrian desperately. "I was n't responsible. I had determined to finish the whole business, to cut it out permanently."

"But Harris came, interfered with your plans," interrupted Sir Felix icily; "and you used the knife?"

"No," replied Adrian emphatically.

"Then the girl did," said Sir Felix.

"No," replied Adrian once more.

Sir Felix made a gesture of impatience. "You're lying," he asserted.

Drusilla protested angrily. Sir Felix was going too far. It was almost like hitting a man when he was down.

Sir Felix ignored the protest. Keeping his eyes fixed on Adrian, "You're lying," he repeated, "either to save yourself, or the girl."

"Please," cried Drusilla, shuddering. "I can't bear this."

Sir Felix turned to her with a suggestion of apology, a touch of pity. "I asked you to go," he said.

"I can't," replied Drusilla. "I can't go. I *must* know. . . . Whatever Adrian has done, I stand with him."

Her loyalty, her courage, her defiance of authority, proved almost too much for Adrian. He put out his hand almost instinctively, then was about to draw it back; but Drusilla took it proudly and

faced Sir Felix without flinching. The movement was more dramatic than words could have made it. It was a confession of love, a surrender of pride, the gesture of a woman possessing a great soul. Even Sir Felix, adamant where his duty was concerned, was a little touched.

"I admit the difficulty of your position," he said. "If you confess to the murder, Drusilla will suffer; if you deny it, the young woman is proved guilty. If you protest that she did it either to save you or in self-defense, you will have to appear in court and swear to it; in which case, the whole thing must be made public, and your friends will scarcely be so credulous as your wife, whose life you will have ruined. Whichever way you look at it, the position is not a pleasant one either for you, for Drusilla, or for the girl."

Adrian nodded. What Felix said was true. The position was untenable. Bitterly he regretted his folly, his weakness—the loss of a sense of proportion that had allowed him to yield to the power of the unknown forces that had driven him into such a dilemma. A man was never so full of self-contempt as when he had to pay for his folly with other people's unhappiness. Life was like a machine: one divergence from the normal on the part of the smallest cog or wheel affected all the rest of the machinery. It was an answer to the individualist: no man stood alone; no man could play

a lone hand; the chain linked all humanity together—the dead, the living, those who were to come. The present was built on the past; the future would be the result of both. Every word, every action of the individual set some force in motion—a motion that was perpetual. It brought one back to the simple fact of individual responsibility.

“Adrian,” continued Sir Felix, relaxing to some small extent his magisterial manner, “I want to know the truth. Then we can see if there’s any way out of it commensurable with justice, any way by which a scandal may be avoided.”

“That’s decent of you,” admitted Adrian gratefully.

“What has become of the girl?” asked Sir Felix.

Adrian shook his head. “I don’t know,” he replied.

“You were going to give her money and get her away! Why did n’t you do this before coming home?”

“I could n’t,” said Adrian. “My money was in the suit-case.”

Sir Felix frowned. “And the suit-case was unlocked. . . . Is the money there now?”

Adrian opened the suit-case, found the bank-notes, was about to pocket them.

“Let me see,” said Sir Felix authoritatively. Adrian hesitated, then handed the notes to him. “A hundred pounds,” he murmured, rapidly count-

ing the notes. "You were going out now—to look for her?"

"Yes," replied Adrian, realizing the futility of denial.

"Where?" inquired Sir Felix. "At a station?"
Adrian nodded.

"Useless," exclaimed Sir Felix. "Every station is watched. What will she do when she finds that you don't come?"

"Give me those notes," cried Adrian desperately. The idea of Vicky waiting for him, hour after hour, wondering, doubting, despairing, shocked him into a desire for instant action.

Sir Felix coolly returned the notes to the place from which they had been taken, then closed the suit-case. "This must n't be touched," he said. "It's evidence."

"Damn it, man!" protested Adrian bitterly. "You're inhuman."

"I'm a machine," replied Sir Felix. "I have to be." Then, with startling suddenness, "Why did you kill Harris?" he asked.

Adrian, his nerves raw, almost shouted his reply, "I did n't kill Harris."

"Why did *she* kill him?" persisted Sir Felix.

"Oh, stop! stop!" cried Drusilla. "You're torturing him!"

"Can't you see," protested Sir Felix, "that I'm helpless until I know the truth?"

He turned politely to Adrian, speaking as a guest to his host, and asked permission to use the telephone. Adrian gave it, but inquired anxiously what Felix was going to do.

"Telephone my office," explained Sir Felix.

An idea had occurred to him, brutal, perhaps, and a little unfair, but necessary in the circumstances. Deliberately he left the three of them alone—to talk, to plan, perhaps to act. If the young woman was in the house, she must be forced to disclose herself; if she were not, Adrian would be forced to seek her out. Felix sighed; he had immense pity for an animal caught in a trap.

That Adrian should be mixed up in such a sordid and unsavory intrigue was deplorable. He wondered what Pamela's attitude would be regarding the whole unpleasant business. Her expression was inscrutable; she gave nothing away. But, deep in his own heart, Sir Felix ruefully contemplated a speedy finish to their pleasant companionship. That Pamela would consent to marry him after what he had been forced to do seemed out of the question. She, too, would have the tribal instinct. Duty sometimes led a man into peculiarly difficult stretches of country. There was nothing for him to do but to take a straight line and to go for his hedges without hesitation, heedless of the landing awaiting him. If a man was put in authority over his fellows,

he must prove himself worthy of the honor. To Sir Felix, the privileges of caste were chiefly concerned with duty. . . . He was a little old-fashioned in some of his ideas.

CHAPTER XVIII

“**A**DRIAN,” cried Drusilla, “that girl must be saved.”

Adrian looked at her, anxiously, bewildered, almost desperate. “Where is she?” he asked. “Why did she come here? Why did she go without leaving a message?”

Drusilla felt that it was her duty to assume all responsibility for getting Vicky away; she and Pamela could arrange the details between themselves. “Give me the money,” she said. “I’ll get it to her.”

“How?” inquired Adrian.

“Leave it to me,” she pleaded.

“No,” cried Pamela; “let *me* do it.”

“You can’t,” protested Adrian. “Sladen would never forgive you.”

Pamela gave a shrug. “I don’t know,” she murmured, “that I can forgive *him*.”

Adrian surrendered, took a bundle of notes from his breast pocket, handed them to Pamela. “How can you find her?” he inquired.

“That’s my affair,” replied Pamela, slipping the notes into her dress.

"Pam is right," said Drusilla. Then, seeing that Pamela was absorbed in the shipping columns of "The Times," she turned to Adrian, speaking in a low voice. "There are things between you and me, Adrian, that must be settled afterwards. At the moment, we must concentrate on saving that poor girl. I want to help you—to help her. I'd rather suffer anything," she added, shivering a little as she spoke, "anything—than remain—just an abstraction."

He looked up at her, his eyes eloquent with wonder and worship. Never in his life had he adored her as he adored her now. A woman may be a mystery, she may be irritating, inconsequential, illogical, but in her great moments she touches the sublime; for she reaches the heights of selflessness that few men can achieve.

"That's what I've been in your eyes," continued Drusilla quietly. "I've sat, quivering with rebellion, because—because I could n't make you understand that I was n't cold and passionless. I was so afraid of myself—at first; and, afterwards, I—I think I was afraid of *you*. I've behaved like a fool, and I'm paying for my folly. . . . And now I realize that this poor girl—this poor waif from the slums—would have been willing to give what I have never given."

She stood there, trembling, twisting her hands together.

"Drusilla," he cried. "I love you, Drusilla. No one else!"

"Oh, my dear!" she whispered. "I'm glad you're loyal to me—in spite of everything." Then she pulled herself together and spoke eagerly, quickly. "I've seen the girl. I've seen her face. . . . She killed that man; her face told me. . . . And she did it to save *you*. . . . She loves you, Adrian. That's why I want to save *her*."

"Do you mean that?" muttered Adrian, shakily.

"On my love for you," replied Drusilla steadily, "I mean it."

Adrian glanced round the room to make certain that Sir Felix had not returned. Then, turning to Drusilla, "It's true," he whispered. "She did it—to save me."

"Adrian," cried Drusilla, looking at him as though her whole life depended on his answer. "Tell me the truth! You—care for her?"

"No," replied Adrian steadfastly. "I care for you—only."

"Oh, Adrian!" she whispered. "If that were true. . . ."

Pamela dropped the paper on the floor and moved quickly over toward the archway, meeting Sir Felix, who was returning to the inner hall.

"I've been talking to Scotland Yard," he explained. "The young woman has given herself up and confessed to the murder."

Pamela, aghast at his methods, gave a protesting cry. "Adrian," whispered Drusilla, warningly.

But Adrian, shocked at the intelligence, was conscious of nothing but disaster. "But she did it to save my life," he cried.

"Can you swear to that?" inquired Sir Felix promptly.

"Yes," replied Adrian eagerly. "He was killing me. She did it instinctively."

"Oh, Adrian!" exclaimed Pamela, angry, exasperated. Adrian had demolished the whole structure.

"You're *prepared* to swear to it?" asked Sir Felix.

"Yes," said Adrian without hesitation.

Sir Felix raised his eyebrows. "To risk a scandal," he protested, "and all that it means to Drusilla?"

"Good God, man!" cried Adrian bitterly. "Her life's at stake."

"You would go into the witness-box and swear away your own reputation?" inquired Sir Felix.

"I must save her life," replied Adrian hoarsely.

"You swear on your honor that she did it to save your life?" asked Sir Felix solemnly.

"On my honor," replied Adrian.

"Thank you," exclaimed Sir Felix, relief showing on his face. "That was what I wanted to know."

Adrian stared, white-faced, dazed. "Oh, Adrian!" cried Drusilla. "Don't you see? He tricked you into confessing."

"I had to," explained Sir Felix apologetically.

Adrian moistened his lips and drew his hand across his forehead. "Then she *has n't* given herself up?" he muttered, thoroughly bewildered.

"No," replied Sir Felix. "But she will be arrested. Every port will be closed to her, every station watched."

He hesitated for a moment, giving them the opportunity to speak. Why could n't they recognize the fact that surrender was inevitable? It would be so much wiser. Then, as the silence persisted, "It's useless to prolong this ordeal," he protested. And, turning to Pamela, "Will you give me the key of the billiard-room?" he asked.

"Oh," cried Pamela bitterly. "You knew all the time!"

"I guessed," he admitted.

"Guessed what?" inquired Adrian, who was beginning to feel rather like a tennis-ball. He looked from one to the other, questioningly. "Do you mean," he asked, almost in a whisper, "that she's here?"

"Yes," replied Sir Felix quietly. "She came here. She did n't go away. Consequently, she is still here." Then, with a shrug, "I told you I backed logic before coincidence," he added.

"What are you going to do?" asked Adrian.

Sir Felix looked at him, read the possibility of danger—of some mad, desperate effort to secure the girl's liberty, then turned to Pamela, with cool, assured authority, "The key, please," he said.

"You can't care for me," protested Pamela in a low voice, challenging him, consciously sending him an ultimatum, "if you're ready to bring all this trouble on my people."

Sir Felix made an expressive gesture. "You make my position very difficult," he said.

"You make mine impossible," replied Pamela bitterly.

She gave him the key. He took it, looked at her steadily, read her decision, mentally visualized the long, lonely years confronting him—years full of regret, for he loved her very tenderly, very loyally; then carried on—as the best type of man always does.

He moved over to the billiard-room door, unlocked it, threw it open. "Come in, please," he said.

Vicky entered, blinking a little at the sudden glare. She was worn out; sitting there in the dark had been horrible; she wanted to get it over. Her manner was sullen and defiant. Then, as she came further into the room, she saw Adrian. Her eyes fastened on his face. Her joy at seeing him was pathetic.

Drusilla watched Adrian, fascinated, a little frightened, dreading what she might see on his face.

He went over to Vicky and spoke to her. "Why did n't you wait for me at Paddington," he inquired, "or take the money and get away?"

"What was the good?" replied Vicky with a hopeless shrug.

She had gone into the billiard-room against her own inclinations. From the moment of seeing Drusilla she had looked into the future without the glasses of illusion. She realized that Drusilla's claim was a greater one than her own, that the happiness of the man she loved was inevitably bound up in the woman he had married. She saw her duty plainly; by doing it, she would solve the problem and give these two a chance to be happy. To use a simile popular with her class, she threw no bouquets at herself for her sacrifice. She merely realized that such a sacrifice was demanded of her, and she had made up her mind to see it through.

But she had n't reckoned with Adrian. He, too, was equally determined in the course he had mapped out for himself.

"Sladen," he protested, "I swear to you—on my honor—that it was a question of my life or Harris's. It was a close call, too."

But Sir Felix was accustomed to witness these sudden illustrations of altruism in people whose nerves were on edge, who were scarcely responsible

for what they were saying. He wanted to get at the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

"For Drusilla's sake," he replied, "I should be sorry to hear you make that statement in court."

"He don't need to make no statement," said Vicky eagerly. "I 'm ready to take my gruel."

"That 's impossible!" muttered Adrian. "Don't you agree with me?" he asked, turning to Drusilla.

"Yes," replied Drusilla quietly.

"What 's the good?" protested Vicky. "Ev'ry one 'll know I killed Herb Harris. They 'll have got it in the papers." She turned to Adrian. "An' they 'll say you were muckin' about with me when you ought to 've been at home with *her*. . . . Oh, can't you see," she cried, passionately quivering with the desire to make him understand, "can't you see it 's the one thing I can do—to show I 'm not ungrateful?"

She looked at them all and felt that she had failed to convince them. Then she sat down and stared in front of her. She felt impotent, she longed to submit to the decrees of Destiny. She had no more fight left in her.

Adrian looked from her to Drusilla, who was biting her lip to keep back her tears. Then he went over to Sir Felix. "Give us five minutes," he pleaded. "I 'll offer you my parole."

"And hers?" inquired Sir Felix quietly.

"Yes," replied Adrian. "I'll be answerable."

"All right," said Sir Felix. "I'll wait in the dining-room."

He turned and went out into the hall. Pamela followed him. They met at the foot of the staircase. He made a movement to speak to her. She hesitated, then went slowly up-stairs. He watched her go, then turned away despondently, and went into the dining-room.

"I seem to have made a pretty rotten mess of things," said Adrian.

Drusilla shook her head. "I'm responsible," she whispered.

"God!" cried Adrian desperately. "To think that every impulse given in to, every surrender to self, acts and reacts on others!"

"If you had been unfaithful to me, Adrian," said Drusilla quietly, "I could have forgiven you, but not myself."

He was up against it—they both were—so was Vicky: that machine, man-made, that kept such as Drusilla and himself safe in their homes, that guarded them, protected their property; that machine that understudied the primitive man's idea of Providence, and was always on the lookout for rebels, sinners, and those who faltered in their steps, ready to punish, to sentence, to condemn; that machine that sent children to prison—to a prison in which they lost all sense of beauty and kindliness,

to a prison that shrieked to them of the unfairness of life, of its inequality, of the favoritism of the gods. What chance had Vicky had in comparison with his and Drusilla's chances? She had taken to theft as people of his own class would take to bridge or golf. It was the natural consequence of her environment. What had his own life been? One long parade of self-indulgence. He had lived for enjoyment, for pleasure. Life had been made easy for him. He and his class had everything. They set the fashion, the standard of public taste. They were the privileged, the elect. What they did counted; what they said was cherished. Life for them was one long round of what they pleased to call social duties. The hypocrisy of it! What they did was to hold on greedily to what they had! They were loyal to themselves, loyal to their own rules and codes. Each season brought its own particular form of amusement. A month in the summer was usually given to counteracting the penalties imposed by too much indulgence in rich food and wine, in resting from the fatigue of too much self-imposed pleasure. And yet it was n't entirely their fault. They were trained for such a life, brought up to consider it the ideal existence. Adrian himself was the victim of environment. But this girl, Vicky—the victim of an environment that was hideous, sordid, ugly, criminal; this product of that blot on our civilization whose maze of slums so few well-

shod feet have cared to tread; this outcast, this thief, this murderess, to save Drusilla and himself from scandal, would willingly give herself to the gallows.

Vicky, her brows knit, her face a mask, was mechanically trying to recover a phrase she had heard—it must have been some years ago. What was it they used to say during the war? Of course! “A certain liveliness. . . .” Well, there was always a certain liveliness on the front on which she and her friends were posted; and, if your number was up, what were the odds? It would be all the same a hundred years hence.

“Why did you come here?” asked Adrian.

Vicky gave a shrug. “D’you know why?” she said. “’Cos I wanted to see what *she* was like.”

“Who?” inquired Adrian.

“Whoever it was that kept you from putting it over me,” confessed Vicky. “When I saw her, an’ she talked to me, an’—an’ did n’t preach nor shove me away, well! I knew why you did n’t—spite of my offerin’!”

“Oh, Adrian!” cried Drusilla with a sob. “If we could only save her. . . .”

Adrian looked up. “I’ve thought of a way,” he exclaimed. “Will you forgive me if it hurts you a little?”

“You would n’t hurt me,” replied Drusilla, “unless you had to.”

Adrian sat down at the writing-table and wrote rapidly. Drusilla went over to Vicky and sat down on the couch. "You have taught me something," she said, "the glory of giving. I needed the lesson. For that I shall always be your debtor."

Vicky gave one of her rare and illuminating smiles. "I don't see as how I could ever teach *you* anything," she replied.

Drusilla spoke quietly, revealing herself as she had never been able to do before. This victory over her natural reserve seemed to strengthen her, as the conquering of some weakness does. In such moments, human nature is at its best. "When he came back from the war," she explained, "I began to realize—from little things—from his manner—that he was all at sea, unsatisfied, restless. I made no effort to understand why. Though I tried to draw him back after the first revulsion and shock. . . . But I found I didn't know how. So I just let things drift, growing more and more despondent and miserable. And, as time went on, I seemed to sink further and further into myself and away from him. Though my heart was crying out for him to love me—to want me, my lips refused to carry the message. I was dumb, afraid, impotent. I held my own counsel, hoping—always hoping that he would tire of his—of what he was doing. And then to-night—after a great struggle—I made an effort, an effort to face things—an effort to win him

back. . . . And it seemed as though I had come to my senses—too late.”

She hid her head in her hands. Vicky made a timid attempt to touch her hand—to show her sympathy, then suddenly drew back, remembering that her own hands were stained. “No! No!” she cried. “I did n’t ought to have touched you. My hands ain’t clean.”

The horror in the girl’s eyes appealed to the mother instinct that had been so recently roused in Drusilla. She drew Vicky to her and kissed her forehead. “You poor little waif,” she murmured.

“Oh, Gawd!” muttered Vicky under her breath. Never before had any woman tried to caress and comfort her. The exclamation was more like a prayer than a cry. She was trembling, shaking with emotion, quivering in response to Drusilla’s pity.

Adrian rose and came toward them, then went to the archway and called Sir Felix. He came back toward the fireplace, glancing over what he had written. Pamela came slowly down the stairs; she had changed her gown and was carrying a heavy fur coat, which she threw on a chair in the hall.

“Would you mind asking Felix to come in?” said Adrian.

Pamela nodded and went down the corridor to the dining-room door. “Adrian would like to speak to you,” she explained.

Her face was still inscrutable; her manner gave nothing away. Felix nodded and followed her into the hall.

"This will save you a lot of bother," remarked Adrian, handing what he had written to Sir Felix.

"What is it?" inquired Sir Felix curiously.

"A confession," replied Adrian. Sir Felix looked up, puzzled. "Yes," added Adrian quietly; "I killed Harris. It was in self-defense. I was doing the amateur *Sherlock Holmes* stunt. He attacked me. I had to kill him."

There was a pregnant pause. Drusilla gasped, realized that Adrian was carrying out some carefully thought-out scheme, and was in time to silence Vicky, who was about to protest. It was all done almost instantaneously.

"You mean that?" asked Sir Felix, after reading what Adrian had written.

"Yes," replied Adrian. "You can use it officially."

To himself he had used the old argument: that, for a man to lie was to put himself outside the pale, even though the lie would give him some advantage in business; but a lie to save a woman was justifiable, even obligatory. Such is the code, and with certain men it will never be denounced. Sir Felix may have realized this; if he did, he gave no sign.

"Then we have no need to detain this young

woman," he remarked quite coolly after a slight pause.

Pamela wasted no time. The need for action was imperative.

"Come with me," she said to Vicky. "I'll run you home in my car." Then, seeing Vicky's hesitation, "It's all right," she whispered. "They won't touch Adrian."

She went quickly into the outer hall, returning a moment later with the fur coat she had brought down-stairs. "Come along!" she whispered to Vicky. "I garage my car in the mews at the back of the house."

She held out the coat for Vicky to put on. "Don't sit up for me, Drusilla," she said. Then, in a whisper to Adrian, "I've got the money."

"Southampton," suggested Adrian under his breath. "West Indian boat."

"Washout," replied Pamela, "without a passport?" "I'm going to take her down to Devonshire—to some people I can trust. Leave it to me!"

Sir Felix helped Pamela into her coat; she smiled her thanks. Pamela's smile, when she chose, could be very attractive. Sir Felix was wise enough to accept the smile as an overture. His silence was sufficiently expressive.

Drusilla wound a silk scarf round Vicky's head. "God bless you!" she whispered. "Write to me."

Vicky nodded. It was impossible for her to

speaking. She was holding herself in with a tremendous effort.

"You sha'n't do this—for *me*," she protested, turning to Adrian, scarcely aware of the fact that she was speaking.

"I shall be out on bail to-morrow," he replied. "Good luck, Vicky!"

"There's no need to wish *you* good luck," she whispered. She looked at Drusilla with dog-like gratitude. The inference was obvious.

She turned and went out into the hall. It was the end. She would never see him again. The end had come so quickly, so suddenly. Perhaps it was just as well. Tragedy does not always have the trappings of art to beautify it. To say good-by in a hurry, in the presence of other people, is a tribute paid to the god of irony. But the parting is just as poignant.

"You'll need wrapping up," said Pamela. "It's cold."

Vicky looked back just once. The bright fire, the shaded lights, Drusilla's exquisite personality, Adrian's white, drawn face, the atmosphere of luxury, the sense of security, of comfort—that was the picture she carried in her mind as she went out into the wintry night with Pamela, the picture that remained with her during the long drive to the west, that she saw day and night for many months to come. That, and the memory of a shabby room in

the East End, with Adrian lying on the narrow bed, and, later, the form of Herb Harris lying on the floor. Too many memories for one so young. No wonder the poor mature early, age quickly; knowledge comes to them so soon.

"Adrian," cried Drusilla, as Sir Felix followed the others to the front door.

"It's all right," replied Adrian soothingly. "There'll be nothing worse than newspaper talk."

Drusilla shivered. "Suppose they found out that you had . . . lied?"

"In a good cause," protested Adrian.

The front door closed. Sir Felix came into the room. "I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to accompany me," he said.

Adrian nodded. "You must understand," he explained, "that I was n't quite myself when I made that other statement."

"I understand," replied Sir Felix.

He moved over to the fireplace. "Do you want me to burn this?" he asked Drusilla, showing her the statement Adrian had signed.

"I stand by Adrian," replied Drusilla, "whatever he has done."

"I believe you would," said Sir Felix.

He glanced at Adrian's statement; then, with rather a wry smile, he tore it in two and threw the pieces on the fire, grimly watching the destruction of

his work. "There's my only excuse for letting that girl go," he observed.

"Good Lord!" cried Adrian, amazed. "Why? . . . Why did you do that?"

Sir Felix sighed. "When I am moved to treat a criminal as a human being," he said, "I am no longer fit for my job. You gave me an excuse to let that poor girl go. If I had arrested her, it would have meant that one more life was being sacrificed on the altar of the tribal god who demanded a life for a life. She was not a criminal; prison would have made her one. She would have come out—soiled. It seemed such waste—such damnable waste of a soul. Then, having let her go, I thought of what the exposure would mean to you—and to Drusilla. I suppose it's the old shibboleth of class loyalty. There have been enough exposures of our own class in recent years. . . . Call me a traitor, a sentimentalist! You would be justified. But the murder of Herbert Harris will have to go down in the police annals as an unsolved mystery. You must get the girl away, out of the country, as quickly as possible. It can be done. Then, my dear Adrian, as a taxpayer you should demand my resignation. I fancy Pamela will—when she marries me. I shall spend my declining years in making my private theories public, in attempting to prove to the world that inhuman official punishment is scarcely consistent with Christian ethics; that the solution of the problem

lies, not in building more prisons and workhouses and asylums, but in making life a little less hopeless for those less fortunate than ourselves. Environment, Adrian! Environment. . . . Get rid of your slums, and you'll get rid of your criminals. I always knew that I was a bit of a Bolshevik at heart." He laughed grimly. "I can see 'The Morning Post' and 'Blackwood' getting out their guns to rid the world of a traitor. But, believe me, if we ourselves don't start on the job of putting our house in order, it will be done for us. . . . And we sha'n't like the methods employed. Good night!"

He picked up his coat and hat and went into the hall. A moment later the front door slammed. "I'm a rum sort of person to be at the head of the C.I.D.," muttered Sir Felix to himself as he lit a cigar and made his way toward the Albany.

Drusilla looked at Adrian. "Thank God!" she murmured.

"Drusilla," he whispered.

"Oh, my dear," she cried. "To have you back—as you were—unspoiled. . . . Am I strong enough, attractive enough—to hold you?"

To Adrian the past seemed blurred. All he could see was Drusilla, here at his side, exquisite, understanding, responsive. "My wife," he muttered, his voice broken, his hands trembling.

"Your wife, Adrian," she whispered, hiding her head on his shoulder.

"Drusilla," he murmured, holding her tightly.

She looked up at him and smiled. He drew her face down to his. Their lips met, pressed, clung. Her arms stole round his neck. She drew him closer to her. She seemed to be holding him against the world. They clung together like young lovers, newly wed, oblivious of everything but their great love.

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4 50 Chicks	7 00
1 00	3 4 75
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2 25	2 8 12
7 2 55	2 8 241
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	3 3 2 7
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	7 13
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March

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